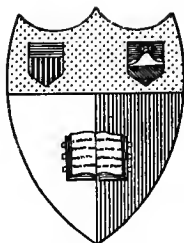


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A VILLAGE PRIEST

BY
HENRI CAUVAIN



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A VILLAGE PRIEST.

A VILLAGE PRIEST

BY
HENRI CAUVAIN

Translated from the French
BY
ALBERT D. VANDAM
AUTHOR OF "AN ENGLISHMAN IN PARIS."



LONDON:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
AND NEW YORK.

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DEDICATION.

MY DEAR TREE,—The pleasant recollection of our long friendship has, to a certain extent, prompted me to dedicate this translation to you. My main motive, however, was to thank you for having been the practical pioneer of a principle I advocated when I had the honour to be a dramatic critic.

In the plays you have hitherto produced you have virtually left Frenchmen and Germans and other foreigners in their habit as they live, instead of foolishly transforming them into Englishmen in deference to a mistaken dramatic exclusivism which thinks humanity out of England not worth studying, or illustrating, and which, moreover, is subversive of all dramatic art. For having set this prejudice at naught, the public and the dramatic student are already greatly indebted to you; and it is to show what may really be done in the way of sterling adaptation by the skilful playwright, backed up by the intellectual and artistic actor-manager, that I translated the original story on which "A Village Priest" is founded, and that I am delighted to associate your name with my work.

Believe me, my dear Tree,

Yours very cordially,

ALBERT D. VANDAM.

To H. Beerbohm-Tree, Esq.

P R E F A C E.



As a rule, a preface to a novel is a mistake. A story that wants explaining is not a work of literary art. In this instance, however, the play and the story upon which it is founded are so widely different as to need a word of warning on the translator's part, lest the public should get puzzled as to which is the original, both being equally powerful. The first original is M. Cauvain's, who based his narrative on a celebrated trial that took place in Brittany late in the forties; the second original is Mr. Sydney Grundy's, who based his play upon an episode in the life of one of the Fathers of the Church—St. John Nepomucene's, I believe—which episode was barely indicated by M. Cauvain. After this he took one idea from the French author, a great many very original ideas of his own, and made an excellent play of the whole.

A VILLAGE PRIEST.

CHAPTER I.

"AND this, my dear André, is the room in which I work and see my clients."

The self-satisfied stress of Armand d'Arcay's words brought a smile to the lips of André Gérard, his old schoolfellow whom, for the last hour, he had been showing over the new house his mother had built at Rennes.

They were standing in a large square room with a high ceiling, which got its light from a window hung with old tapestry curtains.

André Gérard, accustomed to the bare and white-washed walls of his modest studio, gazed with respectful admiration at the somewhat too comfortable quarters of the friend of his childhood.

But in another moment his free-and-easy temperament, rather inclined to sarcasm, got the upper hand.

"In fact," he said, "you are lodged like a Minister of State. Here's the chair of the despoiled orphan, and the arm-chair of the wronged widow. Nay more, there stands the sofa in the event of the widow being young and pretty."

And the walls of the somewhat prim room rang with his frank laughter.

Then they sat down to talk. They had so much to tell one another. They had not seen one another for the last fifteen years. They were mere children when they parted.

One day Madame d'Arcay had laid her hand on her son's head and told him, "You know that your little friend is gone."

The boy had left off playing there and then; he felt heavy at heart, and two big tears had coursed down his cheeks.

"But I had not forgotten you," said Armand, holding out his hand to his friend, after having reminded him of the episode. "You were my best crony in those days. Do you remember the magnificent men you used to draw for me? Since then I have often thought of you. I knew that you had been sent to the other end of France, to a college where the Government had given you a purse by virtue of your being the orphan of a soldier. . . . but I never expected to see you at Rennes after so many years."

"You may be sure of one thing; it is not homesickness that brings me back. For, with the exception of the pleasant recollections of our rambles in your father's big park, my wretched and poverty-stricken childhood has left but a sad impression on my mind. I have come for a small legacy an old aunt of mine was kind enough to leave me, as I told you just now. But the moment I have fulfilled the necessary formalities, I am off to Paris, where I hope you'll join me one of these days. You cannot possibly wish to spend your life in this provincial hole. All you can hope for here is a few ridiculous lawsuits. You'll lead an existence without any ideal, without any interest, without any excitement; in short, you'll simply vegetate."

There was a knowing smile on Armand's face.

"I am very happy here," he said, "and I haven't the least intention of leaving Rennes."

The quick glance of the painter went straight to his friend's soul, that pure, noble and candid soul, that floated into his handsome dark eyes.

"Ho, ho," he said, very quietly; if it is a case of love, that's another thing, and we'll say no more about it."

"But you have not heard me say that" expostulated Armand, turning crimson all of a sudden.

"If you have not told me so before, you are assuredly telling me so now," said the mischievous artist, pointing to the young barrister's red face.

"I have no wish to leave my mother," said Armand, after a short pause. "And my mother wishes to remain at Rennes. She has just had this house built, no doubt to please herself a bit, but a great deal more to please me, for I am to live in it by myself part of the time. You know how fond she is of her country house at Mesnil. She intends to spend the spring and summer months there. There are some dear memories connected with the place."

The young men kept silent for a little while. Armand's last words had been accompanied by a deep sigh, and his eyes drooped with a look of sadness in them. André glanced at him, somewhat embarrassed, not daring to put a question which was evidently uppermost in his mind.

At last, plucking up courage, he said, though rather timidly: "I have not said a word about your father. I did not dare to touch upon so painful a subject. It is all over, is it not?"

"Yes, André, my poor father died three years ago after a terrible agony of fifteen years. Alas, he never recovered his reason, and he died without recognising either my mother or myself."

"I remember your father, a tall, dark man, with a cold, stern eye, the very glance of which made you quake from head to foot. I recollect having my pocket full of marbles one day. All at once, he pulled me abruptly towards him, took me between his knees, that gripped like a vice, and began to question me with such persistency, plying me with

such pointed questions, that at last I confessed to having stolen the marbles. Still, I swear to you that it was not true."

"Yes," said Armand with a rather sad smile; "my father, it would appear, was a matchless examining magistrate. But it was that very zeal, that restless craving to be doing that killed him."

The loud clanging of a bell put a stop to the young men's conversation.

"Breakfast," said Armand, rising from his chair. "Come along, I'll take you to my mother; she'll be delighted to see you again."

"And I shall be pleased to embrace her once more, as in days gone by, provided she'll allow me."

CHAPTER II.

MADAME D'ARCAÿ was already in the large dining-room on the ground floor when the two young men entered. She was not alone. A handsome young girl was arranging flowers in a big vase a few steps away.

At the sound of the door being opened she turned round. And when she caught sight of Armand, she blushed.

"Of course," said André Gérard to himself, and then he added mentally, "Our friend Armand has certainly got good taste."

In fact it would have been difficult to find a handsomer and more graceful creature than Marguérite de Trémeillan, and Gérard was fully justified in mentally congratulating Armand, who had succeeded in winning the young girl's affections.

Marguérite had run to Armand and had taken both his hands in hers before she was aware that there was a stranger in the room. She stepped back, somewhat surprised, and blushed a second time.

"My dear Marguérite," said Armand; "let me introduce to you one of my oldest friends, a friend of my childhood, Monsieur Gérard, who is going to stay with us for a few days."

Then turning to the young artist, he said—

"Mademoiselle de Trémeillan, my intended wife."

There was so sincere, such an emotional ring about the words that Gérard himself felt moved.

The worthy young fellow was one of those artless natures that fall down and worship the blind god whenever and wherever they meet with him. And he guessed that this young couple loved one another with all their soul.

"Mademoiselle," he said; "I have a good mind to scold Armand. We have been chatting away for these two hours and he has not mentioned a word about that which should interest him most."

"He has not said a word about me, has he?"

And the young girl shook her finger reproachfully at Armand.

"I wanted to give him a surprise, my dear Marguérite."

"Say rather that you are too timid to——"

"To admit my own happiness. Well, there is some truth in that. I can scarcely believe that you really consent to be my wife. It is like a dream, like a miraculous event which I can scarcely realise."

And Armand, confused like a child, looked down, and dared not go near her.

"Well, yes, I love you very much," she said cheerfully, going up to him and putting both hands on his shoulders. "Now, I have let out the secret. Does that satisfy you, and will you leave off being afraid to acknowledge me to your friends?"

In answer to all these questions Armand merely caught both her hands and raised them fervently to his lips, while André told himself for the second time that his friend was a very happy fellow to be loved by this beautiful and charming girl.

"Come, my love birds," interrupted Madame d'Arcay, "let us have done with poesy for the moment and turn to prose, if you do not mind. Let us sit down; Monsieur André, you have scarcely said 'How do you do' to me."

André was full of apologies. The fact was that Mademoiselle de Trémeillan's beauty had almost made him forget Madame d'Arcay, who had been standing a little way off.

To repair his error he stepped up to her, and as in days gone by held up both cheeks, which she kissed affectionately.

The breakfast was very animated, and a visitor having called before it was fairly over, Madame d'Arcay was obliged to go to the drawing-room with Marguérite. The young men went to smoke their cigars in the garden.

They had been there but a few minutes when a servant came up to Armand.

"What is it, Baptiste?" asked the young fellow.

"There is someone outside who wishes to speak to monsieur," said the old servitor, pointing to the front gate, behind which, in fact, stood a dark, indistinct figure.

"Very well, let the person come in."

"Yes, Monsieur, but——"

"But what?"

"The man looks very disreputable."

"What does he want with me?"

"He wants to see monsieur on business, about a lawsuit."

"By all that's good," exclaimed Armand, turning to his friend, who having stopped behind had not heard the words spoken in almost a whisper of the old servant. "A client, my boy; my first client."

"Really?" said Gérard. "I should like to have a look at that happy person who will be the first occupant of that magnificent yellow armchair, with the paternal eye of the Demosthenes upon him. At

any rate, is it what you would term a client of consequence?"

Old Baptiste made a significant grimace.

"No? That's a pity. But, after all, it is not a question of money with young Maître d'Arcay."

The gate swung on its hinge, and a man appeared in the opening. The client was probably getting impatient.

"H'm," said Gérard, after having glanced at him. "I would sooner meet him by daylight than at night in a wood. What a dreadful face. This, my boy," taking in the stranger from head to toe, "this is a criminal affair, if ever there was one. I wish you joy, Armand; it is better than one of those civil suits over which everyone falls asleep, judges and counsel alike. What you want is the Assize Courts, magnificent speeches, noble sentiments, and so on. As for that matter, it would suit me very well also. I ought to have gone in for the Bar," he wound up, sawing the air with his two long arms.

"I'll see that man," said Armand. "Show him upstairs, Baptiste. There is no necessity for the ladies to see him. In fact, he might frighten them. Take him by the back staircase."

Baptiste nodded respectfully, went up to the stranger, with whom he disappeared through a door leading to the back staircase.

Armand asked his friend to excuse him, lightly ran up the stairs leading to the house, and entered his own room to receive his first client.

CHAPTER III.

HE had scarcely settled himself at his writing-table when the door was opened, and the man stood on the threshold. Baptiste had retired after having shown him in.

The stranger stood stockstill for a moment, looking around him with a dazed look. He was evidently trying to pull himself together, and the dust with which his clothes were covered showed that he had come a long way, and walked quickly.

Armand pointed to a chair, but the stranger appeared to take no notice of this invitation.

"Sit down, friend," said the young barrister, somewhat surprised at the man's strange behaviour.

Then, and then only, the man slowly took off the battered hat he wore. He mopped the perspiration from off his face, deposited his stick in a corner, and seated himself close to Armand's writing-table.

He made an attempt to speak, but the words stuck in his throat. With an unsteady stand he undid the kind of twisted rope that did duty as a cravat, and then he made a sign, intimating that he was thirsty.

It is probable that with any other barrister but Armand d'Arcay, such a personage would have been quickly shown the door. But Armand was young, and good-natured to a fault; the man was his first client, and there was, besides, something strange and mysterious about him which roused the barrister's curiosity.

So he got up and went to a small table on which stood a tray and glasses, and brought the stranger one of the latter, into which he had poured pretty well half of a small flagon of brandy.

The stranger gulped it down at one draught, and a scarcely audible, "thank you" came from his lips.

"And now, friend," said Armand; "tell me what brings you here."

The stranger made another attempt to speak, and this time he succeeded, but his voice was so low and weak that Armand was compelled to lean forward in order to hear what he said.

"Monsieur," the stranger began; "I have come to you to help me to get justice. It is not an

ordinary affair. I am not a peasant asking you to plead against a neighbour. Nor am I, as you might be led to suppose by my ragged clothes, a beggar who has been in trouble with the *gendarmérie*.

"I am, Monsieur, an honest man who has just left a convict prison, where he has spent twenty years of his life, and who wishes his honour re-established. I am an innocent man who wants his innocence proved."

The dull voice of the stranger had become clear; he spoke the last words with great firmness, drew himself up, and placed his clenched fist energetically on the ledge of the barrister's writing-table.

Armand felt rather moved by this beginning, and still more curious to know who the stranger was, and what the story he was going to relate to him. In spite of his youth and inexperience he was aware that all criminals invariably profess their innocence and accuse the judges who sentenced them.

But in this instance the affirmation to that effect was singularly clear and imposing.

The stranger seemed to have foreseen the barrister's suspicion.

"Monsieur," he said, "I want you to take an interest in my case. I beseech you to believe me innocent. If you cannot listen to me, tell me so, and I will go to some one else. But I must have justice. The moment I arrived in this town, without even waiting to take the necessary rest after a thirty miles' march under a scorching sun, without wasting time to have something to eat and to drink, though I am nearly faint with hunger and thirst, without even inquiring in the neighbourhood whether a poor girl I left behind to go to prison be alive or dead, I asked some one to show me the residence of a barrister. They showed me yours; I have not even asked your name, but came as fast as my legs would carry me, and here I am. The day for which I have been waiting for the

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last twenty years—do you understand, Monsieur—for twenty years, has come. I am under the impression that I shall be able to prove my innocence now, that I shall be happy once more, that all my sufferings will be forgotten. Yes, Monsieur, you have the power to do all this. You can give me more than life. I beseech you listen to me and to have pity on me. Do not treat me as a miserable outcast. I swear to you that beneath these poor clothes, beneath this repellent and sinister appearance there is an honest man, and that honest man, Monsieur, beseeches you on his knees.”

And the stranger clasped his hands on the ledge of the table and leant his head upon them.

Armand watched him intently for a moment or so. He felt strangely overcome, but still would not allow himself to be carried away. He tried to remain unmoved confronted by this grief, which was no doubt only a well-enacted comedy.

He had been brought up with such respect for the magistracy, the recollection of his father appealed to him as so lofty a personification of inflexible justice, that he could not admit the possibility of an error of the law. The stranger rose from his seat and looked fixedly at the young barrister. He drew a long, deep sigh and shook his head, which was perfectly white.

“Ah, Monsieur,” he said despondently; “it is very difficult for people who are down in the world to inspire confidence. Besides, I never made myself any illusions about the difficulties that stood in my path. I know that all criminals make themselves out innocent. All my fellow-prisoners swore that the judges had made a mistake in condemning them.”

“I am aware of it,” said Armand, with a look conveying that he was on his guard against being too confiding.

“But I swear to you that they made an error in my case,” exclaimed the stranger. “I swear to

you, Monsieur, that I am an innocent, unfortunate man, and that I deserve your pity."

"Well, tell me your story," said Armand, leaning back in his arm-chair.

CHAPTER IV.

"My story can be told in a few words," said the stranger, after having sat silent for a few moments. My parents belonged to these parts, and were much respected. My father's name was Pierre Torquenié."

"You are Jean Torquenié?" exclaimed Armand.

"Yes," said the stranger, with great surprise.

"Do you know me?"

"I have heard people speak of your trial, which caused a great deal of excitement at the time. You assassinated Viscount de Mortrée, and you poisoned your wife."

"Yes, that's what I was sentenced for," said the man very bitterly. "If you know that story there is no need for me to go over it again."

"I know, in fact, every particular of it," said Armand.

And, after a short pause, he went on, "I even warn you that you will have great difficulty in convincing me of your innocence, for I know better than anybody that the prosecution was admirably conducted, that the examining magistrate did his duty to the utmost, and that the guilty man made a full confession to him."

"The judge," shouted the man, becoming very restless all at once; "the judge! Oh, Monsieur, if you could have known the man who conducted the preliminary investigation. If you but knew the

torture he made me suffer, yes the torture, I say. And still, I stood on my defence, I resisted, struggled as hard as I could. But what chance has a poor wretch who has suffered solitary confinement for six months even before his trial, who is treated like a dog, who is plied with questions every day, and, as it were, turned inside out until he loses his head? Ah, if the walls of the prison could have been made to speak. If the jury could have been present in that forbidding room which I still see before me, which I have never ceased to see for a single moment of my wretched life; if they could have been present at the scene between myself and the torturer who questioned me, they would have understood how, with every atom of strength gone, I confessed to having committed, how I invented, a crime of which I was as innocent as a child, how, driven out of my mind, broken down with grief, I gave myself up at last, bound hand and foot."

"Silence, you wretched creature," said Armand, carried away by his indignation. "I will not have you insult your judge in my presence."

"Ah, you are pitiless," cried Jean Torquenié, wringing his hands. "You show me the door, you refuse to hear me. Very well, Monsieur," he concluded, as he rose from his chair, "I shall go to another lawyer. I was told that you barristers were kind and generous-hearted, that when a man came to beg of you to defend him by showing you that he is innocent, you did not refuse him your help. When, on leaving my prison, I started on my road to demand justice of the men who sentenced me, I never dreamed that the first obstacle in my path should come from him whose mission it is to defend those who are unhappy."

There was a kind of resigned dignity about Jean Torquenié's last words which was very affecting. But Armand seemed made of stone. The young man whose heart was capable of any and every

generous impulse, the dream of whose short life had been contained in one word—"devotion," who had chosen the barrister's profession for no other motive but to make his existence a useful one, remained like marble in the presence of the man who was imploring his help.

Evidently his relentless attitude was inspired by powerful reasons, and he must have felt convinced that this man was lying to him.

"Good-bye, Monsieur," said the latter, with indescribable sadness.

Armand looked away from him with a kind of disgust.

But all of a sudden, as he was about to cross the threshold, Jean Torquenié stood stock-still; a yell burst from his throat, he stretched forth his arms towards a portrait in a dark frame that hung against a panel, and he seemed overcome by some terrible emotion.

"Ah! here he is, here he is, the wretch who tortured me, who disgraced me, who ruined my life, who has perhaps killed my child. Ah, the torturer, if he be alive still——"

Saying which he shook his fists at the portrait with a terrible, threatening look.

But Armand had flung himself upon him and taken hold of his arm, which he shook violently.

"Silence, you wretched man," he shouted, turning livid with anger. And laying his powerful hand on Jean Torquenié's, as if wanting to force him to bend down to him whom he had just insulted, he added fervently, "This honest man was my father."

The released convict shook himself free and stared the young man straight in the face.

"Your father!" he shouted, his mind in a perfect whirl. "And he is dead. Better so. Now I can understand your repulsion, your harshness towards me. You are cruel like your father. May my curse fall upon you as upon him,"

And with a last look of fury at the portrait he strode away like a madman without even turning his head.

CHAPTER V.

THIS violent scene had left an impression on Armand's mind which he felt unable to shake off during the remainder of the day.

Marguérite noticed the somewhat worried looks of her intended, but in spite of her affectionate enquiries failed to ascertain the cause. Armand assured her that he had never felt happier in his life. He had only a headache he said, and he retired early to his own room.

André Gérard, surprised and uneasy at his friend's pre-occupied mien, went after him the moment he left the drawing-room.

"Friend Armand," he said, putting his hand on his shoulder, "there is something that worries you. Mademoiselle de Trémeillan noticed it. She requested me just now to ascertain the reason of your low spirits. What am I to do, what am I to tell her?"

"Leave me to myself for a little while," replied Armand gently, and drawing back a few steps. "Marguérite has made herself uneasy for no reason whatever. What is there so very peculiar about me?"

"I beg of you not to try to hoodwink me. Mademoiselle de Trémeillan has no notion of what troubles you, but I have. It is the visit of that strange man that made you feel worried, that made you taciturn. But, my dear old friend, if you are going to allow yourself to be affected in that way by all the stories your clients come telling you, you will be the most miserable of men, the most lachrymose of barristers."

‘Dont joke about the matter, I beg of you,’ said Armand, moving once more as if to go. Then he stood lost in thought for a moment, and took André’s hand.

“Look here, I am going to tell you what worries me. I feel I had better confide it to you and ask your advice.”

They went to Armand’s room, and the moment the door was closed behind them, the young barrister, apparently anxious to relieve his mind, told his friend briefly all the circumstances connected with Jean Torquenié’s visit.

When he had finished his story he looked at the young painter, as if expecting him to give his advice.

André Gérard had become very grave. He walked up and down the room for a minute or so, with his hands behind his back. Then he stopped in front of Armand.

“This is very strange, and I can full well understand that this visit has deeply affected you. But before giving an opinion on the subject, I should like to know the history of this man, the circumstances connected with his crime, the particulars of his trial.”

“The affair caused a good deal of sensation at the time, and the *Gazette des Tribunaux* gave a full report at the time of the trial.* I’ll have the volume that contains the report taken to your room to-night. You shall read it, and you will find that there is no possibility of doubt. The man confessed; he avowed himself guilty of the crime, and he was justly sentenced.”

“And still,” said André, taking his friend’s hand in his, “and still you, my poor boy, are harassed by a terrible doubt, and cannot help being intensely anxious.”

“No, no,” said Armand, emphatically; “I can

* An old-established journal, analogous to the *English Law Times*, but which appears six days a week.—*Transl.*

assure you that I am firmly convinced on the subject. My father was known to one of the ablest magistrates in the 'jurisdiction,'* as one of the most upright, severe, and talented judges. And after all is said and done, the man confessed to his crime."

Armand kept on repeating these words at every moment, as if desirous to convince himself thoroughly that no mistake could have been possible, and that no blot should stain the memory of his father, the loving and reverential worship of which was part of his life.

"My dear André, be kind enough to go back to the drawing-room. They must not find out that this man has been here. Tell them that I do not feel very well. Tell them whatever you like, but I rely upon your friendship to keep the knowledge of what has occurred here to-day from my mother and Marguérite.

André Gérard did as his friend bade him. He tried to convince Marguérite that Armand had nothing on his mind, that he would be all right in the morning. He pledged his word that Armand himself felt very sorry at his low spirits, but that his headache made him feel very ill.

Madame d'Arcay accepted all this as so much sterling coin. As for Marguérite, she smiled wistfully and said: "I am willing to believe you, Monsieur, and willing to believe Armand. I trust that if he had anything serious on his mind, he would tell me. Ought not we to share one another's secrets?"

Marguérite retired with Madame d'Arcay for the night. She had been at Rennes since the previous day. Her father had sent her to Madame d'Arcay's because he was obliged to visit a distant farm on business; and he did not care to leave her by herself at the country seat. He was to come and fetch her next day.

* In France there is no circuit, as in England; each province has its own courts, superior as well as lower.—*Transl.*

CHAPTER VI.

ANDRE GERARD, who, when in Paris was an irreclaimable night bird, by no means cared to go to bed so early.

It was a magnificent moonlit night, the air struck soft and warm, so he borrowed a latchkey of old Baptiste and went out.

Madame d'Arcay's house stands in the quarter immediately adjoining the river Ille, which at that spot makes a delightful bend, the inside of which is taken up by an eyot of poplars and grey willow.

To the left a mill bars the river. A cluster of old-fashioned tenements with wooden joists and roofs, built awry like a cap on a drunken man's head, stands right on the water's edge. The windows of some of these houses are lighted up the greater part of the night, and the sounds of song and carouse, accompanied by the strident notes of a brass instrument, fall upon the air.

These are the lower class drinking-shops and taverns, ill-famed haunts, mostly frequented by the workmen of the woollen mills of Breton and Co., the tall chimneys and vast buildings of which lie to the right. A promenade bordered with dense and somewhat stunted lime-trees forms as it were a continuation of the river and affords a very picturesque view of the verdant eyot, the mill and the old tenements.

With the full moonlight upon it, the whole made a delightful picture, and André sat himself down on a wooden bench to feast his eyes upon this quaint corner of the town. But the noise from the drinking-shops interrupted his gentle meditations. The

workmen had received their fortnightly pay that day, and were celebrating the event in a boisterous way.

André got up, crossed the river near the mill and made his way right into the little eyot, the foliage of which lay glinting in the moonlight.

He stretched himself lazily on the thick grass and amused himself by watching the effect of the poplar leaves quivering overhead like so many tiny silver blades.

In a little while he fell into a kind of drowsy state, which was by no means unpleasant amidst the fragrant odour of the tall grass, as soft and yielding as a bed of eider down.

The sound of hurried footsteps on the tiny bridge that led to the mill suddenly awoke him from his reverie, and to his great surprise a big shadow loomed all at once in the near distance.

The individual who had found his way into the small clearing stopped and remained motionless for a moment, and by the light of the moon André perceived a tall man with a slight stoop about the shoulders. He was bare-headed and his hair perfectly white.

He was carrying a woman, who seemed to have fainted for the moment. He got to the clearing, he had laid her on the grass, and kneeling by her side, endeavoured to bring her to.

André was not likely to remain an indifferent spectator of the scene. He stepped up to the man and his companion.

When he heard someone approaching from behind the stranger suddenly started to his legs and made a movement as if to take up the young woman and to carry her off.

But André reassured him with a few words and offered him his assistance.

The man accepted, and while the young fellow lifted the girl's head and wiped the blood from off her forehead with his handkerchief, which he had

dipped into the river, the stranger told him briefly how he had met with the poor creature.

He was making his way through the poorer quarter of the town when his attention was suddenly arrested by loud cries; and he saw the young girl being pursued by a crowd of women and children. She ran as fast as she could and was uttering low cries of distress all the while. He rushed forward to defend her and at the same moment a stone struck her on the forehead. She dropped fainting to the ground. On seeing their victim prostrate the rabble stopped, and the man immediately lifted the wounded girl in his arms and carried her down a dark alley. He noticed that at the further end there was a bridge leading into the open country. He immediately made for it, so as to save the girl from the further cruelty of her pursuers.

"The poor and unfortunate should stand by one another, shouldn't they?" he said with a sad shake of the head.

"She seems to come to," said Gérard, who had felt the girl's shapely and nervous wrist quiver in his clasp. "She cannot stop here. Shall I help you to take her to your home?"

"To my home," repeated the man in a bitter tone; "to my home." Then after a moment's silence, he went on, "I am absolutely without a roof to put my head under, Monsieur, and to-morrow, before daybreak, I shall be compelled to leave this town."

Just then the girl seemed to recover consciousness altogether; she drew a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

André lifted her head gently, and the first thing the poor creature did was to put her hand to her forehead, and a moan of distress came from the colourless lips. The gash, which was a deep one, evidently caused her acute pain.

André once more put his wet handkerchief, which

by this time was stained with blood, to her forehead.

In a few moments she was able to speak. She saw that the two men who had come to her assistance were strangers to her. In a scarcely audible voice she told them that she had been a hand at the Breton Mills since her childhood, that she had always been ill-treated by her fellow-hands, insulted by the foreman.

She told them all she had to endure, and gradually her voice became harsh and savage. There was no doubt about it, this heart of barely twenty felt sore indeed.

"And do you know why they are all against me?" she went on with increased animation; "why they despise me, why they strike me? It is because I am the child of a convict. Is it my fault, I ask you, that my father committed murder? Ah, I should like to be a man." She partly rose from her prostrate position and shook her clenched fist at that quarter of the town where the lurid lights were cast back by the stream.

But Jean Torquenié, with a fervid movement of his own, caught hold of the hand, and suddenly threw back the young girl's head so as to let the moonlight that was filtering through the trees fall upon it. Then with a stifled cry he flung both his arms round her neck and passionately kissed the blood-stained forehead.

The young girl freed herself from his embrace and for a moment looked at him with a vague wandering look.

"Oh, how like her," murmured the man to himself. "It is she, it is she. Jeanne," he cried, trying to take her in his arms once more.

But the girl had started to her feet, and with a movement of horror and disgust, flung him back with all her might. "Don't touch me don't touch me," she cried.

"Jeanne, Jeanne, I am your father," wailed the liberated convict in a heartrending voice.

"My father," repeated the girl, and drew back still further with a movement of dread.

"Yes, I am your father," Jean Torquenié went on, pale and panting with emotion. "I am your father, your father who is innocent, do you hear? Come, Jeanne, let me take you in my arms. Poor child. They ill-treat you because of me. How horrible. But there will be an end to all this, for the world shall know that I am not guilty, and they will despise us no longer. I shall make them respect you. My poor child; how handsome she is, and how fond I will be of her."

By this time they had both started to their feet, and as the man drew a step nearer to the girl his deeply lined face was suddenly lighted up by a smile, the first smile that had been there for these twenty years.

But Jeanne pushed him back once more. "Don't touch me, don't touch me," she cried. Her eyes darted flames, her face quivered with excitement, and in a savage voice, she kept on repeating, "Don't touch me, don't touch me."

At last she wound up with a "I hate you," and at the same time she made a rush for the small wooden bridge, and disappeared.

Jean Torquenié had dropped into a sitting posture on the grass, and hid his face in his hands. Heartrending sobs shook his powerful frame.

The strange scene had made a deep impression on André Gérard. He had not the same motives as his friend Armand for mistrusting his emotion. He felt a strange sympathy for this poor, unfortunate man, and spontaneously he held out his hand to him.

"Ah, Monsieur," exclaimed Torquenié, clasping it vigorously; "this is the first time that people do not turn away from me. This is the first hand held

out to me these twenty years. You pity me; you are kind and good. Do not you think that it is horrible to suffer as I do, and unjustly? Twenty years' imprisonment for a crime I did not commit. And when I come here to demand justice, the lawyers show me the door. I happen to come upon my daughter: she curses, and flies from me. Poor child, I forgive her," he said in a tone full of pity. "During these long years she has only learned to hate me, and the whole of her sufferings are owing to me, to me; do you understand, to me, who love her with all my heart, who thought of nothing but her happiness when God gave her to me."

André felt more and more affected. He was struck by the man's face, which, notwithstanding the ravages left upon it by sorrow, was singularly handsome when lighted up by excitement.

He also noticed that the man expressed himself in terms scarcely to be expected from a miserable wretch who had spent half his life in prison.

"And here I am," concluded Jean Torquenié, "alone, absolutely alone, deserted by everyone. And still I mean to have justice," he exclaimed, rising to his feet. "I mean to have it, and now more than ever."

And he turned his tear-stained face in the direction whither Jeanne had disappeared.

"I am going to continue my journey," he added, picking up his stick, which he had flung on the grass. "Whither, Heaven alone knows. I have been discharged from prison, and still I am not free until the day when the law shall have recognised its error. I shall not be able to move a step without at every moment feeling the hand of the police on my shoulder. What a wretched existence, indeed."

"Then you are not going to remain here?" asked André.

"No, they have fixed upon Evreux as my place of residence, and I am bound to go thither. I only

came here to consult a barrister, for I was anxious that the error should be recognised there where it was committed. But I was cruelly mistaken. I went to two lawyers to-day. They both showed me the door. The one refused to believe me; the other saw that I was too poor."

Then after a moment's silence he went on—

"I will not take up your time any longer, Monsieur, in talking of my wretched self. You have been kind to me. Allow me to thank you once more. I swear to you that your kindness was not wasted, and that the hand you clasped just now was that of an honest man."

He had already turned his back when André stopped. The poor fellow was likely to be without means, and though the young painter's purse was but scantily lined, he would not let Jean Torquenié go without offering him the wherewithal to provide for his most urgent wants.

At the suggestion to that effect the discharged convict hung his head, and André was under the impression that a vivid crimson tinged the hollow, sunken features.

Nevertheless, after a visible effort to overcome his reluctance, Jean Torquenié replied in a sorrowful tone—

"I thank you for your offer, Monsieur, if you will allow me to accept it as a loan, not as a gift. I hope to be able to repay you soon. I have a trade, and I mean to work." Then after another moment of hesitation, "May I ask to whom I am indebted for this generous compassion?"

"My name is André Gérard, and here is my address," said the young painter, placing his card in Jean Torquenié's hand.

A few moments later the discharged convict was out of sight, and André, in deep thought, made his way through the poorer quarter of the town, which by this time had become silent and deserted.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN he came back André found the volume of the *Gazette des Tribunaux* lying on his table.

He felt too great an interest by this time in Jean Torquenié's story to postpone the knowledge of the particulars, so he sat down there and then to read the report of the Torquenié case, tried at the Rennes Assize Court in 1847.

The indictment read as follows :—

“On the 25th April a waggoner from Bourrée, on his way to Bonnières, in passing a ditch, close to the spot called ‘The Cat's Hole,’ came upon the body of a young man, which he immediately recognised as that of the Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée.

“The waggoner placed the body on his cart and took it to Bonnières. The authorities were immediately communicated with, and began a formal inquiry. The body was dressed in a pair of trousers and shirt. One of its feet was bare, the shoe on the other had its laces untied.

“Neither money nor jewellery was found on the body. One of the trousers pockets contained a small book, bound in blue, the odd volume of a novel.

“The body had been struck in the forehead by a bullet which must have caused instantaneous death ; the bullet was found in the wound, and was a round one, used with the obsolete large-bore regulation rifle.

“Young Viscount Marcellin's life and habits, as far as they were known, precluded all idea of suicide. Left an orphan at an early age, possessed of great wealth, he had everything that can make life bright

and happy. Truly, he was of a somewhat strange disposition. He dressed, lived and spoke in a way that often surprised those who were not on intimate terms with them. But there was nothing to lead to the supposition that he had any reason for attempting his own life. Besides, no weapon that could have served to that effect was found near his body, and the spot where the latter was found, together with the disordered condition of his dress, furthermore forbade all supposition of a self-inflicted death.

"It was, therefore, but too evident that the law stood confronted with a crime. Its duty was to determine the manner in which the murder had been committed, and to discover the murderer. A protracted and difficult inquiry has led to that result.

"A very careful plan was made of the spot where the body of Viscount Mortrée was found. The body was lying in the less wooded part of the road. A short distance further on begins the thick underwood of what is called *Le Bocage*, and which is on a higher level than the road. This underwood has been thoroughly searched, and in one coppice the authorities came upon several broken branches, as if someone had forced his way through it.

"It was, therefore, easy to 'reconstruct' the scene of the murder. The murderer had evidently been lying in wait there for his victim. Viscount de Mortrée was killed at the very moment of his crossing the ditch. One foot was still caught in the brambles of the bank, and he dropped with his head in the water. A careful search led to the finding, in an adjoining field, of the missing slice of the young Viscount. The evident conclusion was that he had fled precipitately, and but partly dressed, across the fields, and that he had been killed in that flight. An examination of the body led to the supposition that he had been dead about an hour when the body

was found. Consequently, it must have been about four when the Viscount was killed.

"But whence did he come, and why was he running about in the country at that time of the morning? Who could have any interest in killing him?"

"Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée led a very retired life at his seat 'Les Marnes.' Since the death of his parents, which happened when he was still very young, he had become very melancholy. He took no part in the pleasures and pastimes of young men of his own age and station. The stables and kennels remained tenantless. Now and then people met him, mounted on a spirited, small black horse, but he looked sad, his head reclined on his breast, and he rarely went beyond a walking pace. The exception was when he scoured the adjoining moors at a mad gallop, as if to lay his too ardent passions or his too exciting thoughts by this violent exercise.

"One day in one of those mad gallops he met with an accident. His animal stumbled over a tuft of broom; he lost his seat and was thrown so violently as to break his arm. The gamekeeper of the Count de Trémeillan found him an hour later, lying in a dead faint on the moor. He shouted to two or three peasants who happened to be passing by, and, as the Count's seat of 'd'Albrays' was nearer than 'Les Marnes,' the keeper had the wounded man carried to his own home. He was living in a small lodge near the park gates. The Viscount stopped for two days at the gamekeeper's, then, when the arm was set, he was taken to 'Les Marnes.'

"After his recovery, the Viscount went to thank the gamckekeeper, and from that day forth his visits became somewhat frequent. In his drives of former days, he had never come near 'd'Albrays.'

"No one in the neighbourhood felt surprised at that, for everyone knew of the deep hatred between the

de Trémeillan and the de Mortrée families. But now, on the contrary, the Viscount was often to be met with on that part of the road leading to the gates of 'd'Albrays,' and he was as often seen to disappear among the dense trees of the park.

"The peasants labouring in the fields thereabout, and the small tradespeople of the neighbourhood, were not the only ones that had noticed the frequent walks of Marcellin de Mortrée and the new direction in which they were taken; there was also the gamekeeper, who had found the Viscount on the moor, and whose name was Jean Torquenié. Torquenié was a young fellow of about four and twenty. Two years previously he had married a remarkably handsome girl, with whom he was very much in love, and who was the foster-sister of the Countess de Trémeillan. Jean, who was of a violent and jealous disposition, had not been slow to notice, and with evident displeasure, that the Viscount came prowling about the place. Once or twice, when he was going his morning rounds, he had come upon Marcellin de Mortrée.

"One day, coming home earlier than usual, he had even noticed the Viscount's horse tied to the hedge, near his lodge, and, on entering the kitchen, had found the young nobleman seated by the fireplace. Marianne, Torquenié's wife, was mulling some wine for him, because he had been caught in the rain, and his clothes had got damp. Torquenié fancied that when his wife and her visitor saw him come in, the former shrugged her shoulders in surprise, and the latter showed signs of being annoyed, and when the Viscount was gone, he seriously took Marianne to task for having allowed the visits of the young noble.

"Marianne Torquenié's character justified to a certain extent the apprehensions of the gamekeeper. She was very pretty, and furthermore, very flighty and vain. Before her marriage she had had several intrigues which had somewhat

compromised her reputation, to an extent such that when Jean Torquenié announced his intention of marrying her, his parents opposed his plan for some months, before giving their reluctant consent.

"It was very evident that from the moment of the Viscount's frequent rambles in the neighbourhood of the Trémeillan estate, the character and behaviour of Jean Torquenié had undergone a change for the worse. He had always been quick tempered, he grew more irritable still. He launched into bitter reproaches against his wife without, however, making any direct allusions to Viscount Marcellin's visits. He merely complained of Marianne's coldness towards him, and he maintained that she had never cared for him. One day a man from Bourrée found him seated in the road through the wood. He had got his gun betwixt his legs and was hiding his face in his hands. When the man called out to him he raised his head, and the latter noticed that angry tears stood in his eyes. He asked him in a peculiar way what was the matter with him. He was told in a savage way to mind his own business and to go his way.

"A few moments afterwards an old woman who was going to gather wood passed alongside of him. She also noticed Torquenié's dark looks and began to chaff him.

"'Hallo, Jean, what are you watching for?' she said. 'Is it for a rabbit or for a Viscount?' He jumped up in a towering rage, clasped his gun tightly, and stamping the ground with his feet, shouted to her:—

"'Curse your Viscount, I wish he were lying under this sod, you viper.'

"Finally, another witness, Pierre Desplas by name, and a horse-tapper by trade, who had come to work for a few days at 'd'Albrays,' and had been quartered during that time the cil gamekeeper's lodge, stated that he slept in a room over that of the man and wife,

and was awakened one night by a violent altercation between them. He failed to hear distinctly all that was said. But he deposed to Jean Torquenié having been in such a rage as to have howled like a wolf. He said that his life would henceforth be a constant martyrdom, that he could no longer bear with Marianne's coldness and indifference, that she deceived and tortured him; and that if that state of things went on he should do something desperate. The witness had sworn to the last words being exact, and has repeated them on two separate occasions.

"Jean Torquenié's jealousy was a matter of common talk in the neighbourhood. Consequently, when Viscount de Mortrée's murdered body was found, a vague rumour pointed to Jean Torquenié as the possible author of the crime.

"Nevertheless, for some days the authorities hesitated to act upon the mere expression of public opinion. Jean Torquenié's previous character was a good one. The Count de Trémeillan had always spoken in high terms of the honesty and devotion to his interests of his keeper. True, his brusque temper had not made him many friends in the neighbourhood, but his extreme severity with regard to poachers might have been the partial cause of people holding aloof from him.

"Still, public opinion grew so strong, it so loudly pointed to Torquenié, that the authorities felt bound to direct their investigations in that quarter. A fortnight after the crime a search was made in the lodge of Count de Trémeillan's gamekeeper.

"Marianne was in bed with a violent attack of fever, and being nursed by one of the old servants of the house, nicknamed la Terreuse. Jean Torquenié himself was away from home. The examining magistrate called la Terreuse aside, and asked her how long Marianne had been suffering from this attack. 'Something like a fortnight,' was the

answer. 'She was taken with it all of a sudden one morning. We have all been very anxious about her.'

"Having been asked to be more precise as to the day of Marianne's first attack, the woman seemed to try to recollect, and at last named the evening of the 26th of April—consequently the day following the murder of the Viscount de Mortrée. The guns of the gamekeeper were carefully examined. His three ordinary guns were of too small a bore to admit the bullet that had struck the young Viscount. But at the bottom of a cupboard was found a short carabine, still smelling of powder, and into which the projectile fitted perfectly.

"Marianne did not seem to have heard what was going on around her, nor to have understood the purport of the search at the keeper's lodge. She seemed to be too weak to be questioned.

"At that moment Jean Torquenié came in. When he saw the magistrates he turned very pale, and he uttered a cry of surprise. The king's procurator* informed him of the suspicions with regard to him and requested him to refute the same by giving an account of his movements during the night of the 24th April. The keeper dropped into a chair, put his hands to his face and kept silent. He was shown the carabine that had been found in the cupboard, and it was pointed out to him that the bullet which had killed the Viscount Marcellin was of exactly the same calibre.

"He simply stated that he had not used the weapon for the last two years, and that the last time he had used it—to kill a wolf—he had carefully cleaned it. He did not explain how it came to be stained with powder. When asked to produce the bullets belonging

*A king's procurator is nowadays a Procurator of the Republic and is virtually the public prosecutor attached to every jurisdiction, though he does not always prosecute personally.—*Transl.*

to the carabine, he answered that he did not know what had become of them.

"With regard to his movements during the night (or rather the morning) of the 25th April he was unable to give any precise information. He could only state positively that the few rounds he had made at night for the last fortnight had all terminated before day-break.

"The confused answers of the man, his unsatisfactory explanations, and the grave discovery at his house of the weapon that presumably had been the instrument of the crime, confirmed the suspicions entertained against him by all those who knew his violent character, quick to take offence.

"Nevertheless the proofs were not sufficiently conclusive to institute criminal proceedings. Besides it was necessary to wait for the recovery of Marianne Torquenié in order to question her. Meanwhile the authorities set on foot a fresh inquiry, and pursued their search in every direction for the murderer of Viscount Marcellin.

"Pending the result, Marianne Torquenié died. It was difficult to admit that the fever, which was by no means serious, though it had laid her prostrate for three weeks, had caused her death. This sudden and apparently unnatural death drew the attention of the public and of the authorities once more to the game-keeper's domicile. People began to ask themselves whether Jean Torquenié, apprehensive of the revelations of his wife, had not suppressed, by means of a new crime, a witness whose evidence might have proved positively crushing.

"A *post-mortem* examination was ordered, and the physician entrusted with the task formally testified to poisoning by phosphorus. The body was absolutely saturated with the poisonous substance. The unfortunate woman must have swallowed considerable quantities of it.

"This time doubt was no longer possible. Who

could have an interest in that crime except Jean Torquenié? He was arrested and taken to Rennes.

"For many weary weeks he persisted in denying his double crime. He admitted that the frequent visits of Viscount de Mortrée had annoyed him, but that he was perfectly certain of Marianne's innocence, and that even if she had been guilty, he would never have been base enough to kill a defenceless man as one kills a piece of game from behind a hedge, and to poison a poor woman whom he loved with all his heart. Yes, he persisted for a long while in this system of absolute denial.

"But one day, gnawed by his remorse, no doubt, he asked to be taken before the judge entrusted with the investigation of this difficult affair. When there he made a complete confession. He pleaded guilty to the murder of Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée. He admitted that prompted by jealousy he had wanted to rid himself of him. Finally he confessed to having poisoned his wife with beef tea in which he had thrown phosphor balls, which he occasionally used to destroy rats and field mice.

"In consequence whereof we, etc., etc."

André skipped the technical phraseology of the end of the indictment, and turned to the more important part of the report as given below.

CHAPTER VIII.

"DURING the reading of the indictment Jean Torquenié sat utterly crushed, with his head buried in his hands. He only seems to have shaken off his lethargy towards the end, for at the mention of his having confessed to his guilt, he shivered from head to foot and cast a bewildered look around him.

“When the clerk of the arraigns has finished reading the indictment, the presiding judge proceeds to interrogate the prisoner.

“‘Jean Torquenié, stand up. How old are you?’

“‘Twenty-four.’

“‘Your conduct through life has been a satisfactory one. You succeeded your father as gamekeeper to the Count de Trémeillan. The Count’s father took a great liking to you and had you educated properly. You shared for some time the lessons of his youngest son, who has died since. The tutor who knew you as a child speaks highly of your intelligence. But he also testifies to your violent temper. It appears that one day when you failed to understand a problem he was explaining to you, you suddenly upset the table at which you were seated. In 1845 you married Marianne Danet, by whom you have a little girl. When you married her, her reputation was none of the best. She had had some intrigue with a young man of Bonnières.’

“The prisoner makes a motion as if wanting to speak. In fact he utters a few words, but they are altogether inaudible.

“‘I must ask you to reply in a loud voice to my questions. Remember that it is a question of life and death with you. The crime you have committed——’

“‘Maître Rousseau, the prisoner’s counsel, rises quickly to his feet: ‘I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Président, I am under the impression that my client stands in this dock as an accused person, not as one whose guilt has been proved.’

“The President: ‘Maître Rousseau, I intend to conduct the trial as I see fit. Be good enough to sit down. Torquenié, do you admit that your wife was rather flighty and vain, and that you have violently remonstrated with her on that score?’

“Marianne was an honest woman; yes, gentlemen, an honest woman. It is martyrdom to me to

have to listen to this.' Saying which he drops back in his seat, thoroughly crestfallen.

"Answer quietly. The jury will not be influenced by your affectation of despair. And no one inflicts any martyrdom upon you.'

"The prisoner's counsel starts once more to his feet. 'Monsieur le Président, this man was very fond of his wife and child, and the questions you ask him are likely to aggravate his cruel sufferings.'

"His love for Marianne has not prevented him from poisoning her. Maître Rousseau, I must beg of you not to interrupt me at every moment. It is the prisoner who should answer my questions, not you.'

"My unfortunate client has been so reduced by long weary months of imprisonment pending his trial that he is scarcely able to answer. I only ask for a little pity for him, and it seems to me, Monsieur le Président, that I am not exceeding my duty in doing so.'

"I must beg of you once more not to interfere at every moment between the Court and the prisoner. This man has always been very energetic and strong, and if at present he be weak and crestfallen it is only because he is stung by remorse or playing a part.'

"After this the President reviews the various events that have preceded the crime. He draws attention to the fact that Viscount de Mortrée remained for two days at Jean Torquenié's lodge, after he, the deceased, met with his accident. There he saw Marianne and was nursed by her. It was very natural that he should have fallen in love with the young woman, who was very handsome. Subsequently he paid several visits to the lodge. Marianne felt no doubt flattered by the attentions of Viscount Marcellin. Owing to the peculiar nature of his avocations her husband left her a great deal of liberty. She probably took advantage of it and carried on an intrigue with Viscount de Mortrée.

The latter was an unprincipled man, without any religion at all, who must have thought nothing of seducing the wife of the man who had come to his rescue in his sore need.'

"After having briefly recapitulated these facts the President resumes the examination of the prisoner.

"'You admit that the frequent visits of Viscount de Mortrée in the vicinity of 'd'Arblays' made you intensely jealous?'

"The prisoner, trying to control his emotion: 'No, I was not jealous; I knew well enough that Marianne was the best and most honest of women. But I objected to have her name bandied about.'

"'You overwhelmed her with reproaches, which were overheard by witnesses.'

"'Marianne was young and without experience, she was fond of admiration. I know the evil tongues of the neighbourhood. They would not have been slow to say things about her which have been said since. It was to spare herself and myself that kind of grief that I begged her more than once to be circumspect and not to receive visits from the Viscount de Mortrée.'

"'And what was her answer?'

"'She merely laughed and said that I had taken leave of my senses, that Viscount Marcellin had never said an unbecoming word to her, that she had only seen him once or twice, when he came to thank us, and that she could not help his taking walks in the neighbourhood of the house.'

"'A witness will prove directly to having heard you say, on two different occasions, that if this went on you would do something desperate.'

"'I dare say I did say so, as I might have said something else in a moment of anger. I swear before God that I never had any evil thoughts, either with regard to Viscount de Mortrée or with regard to my poor Marianne.'

“ ‘You are trying a new system of defence. (Addressing the jury): Gentlemen of the Jury, I am bound to remind you that during the preliminary investigation, the prisoner has confessed everything. He pleaded guilty to having killed Viscount de Mortrée, to having poisoned his wife, and he has given the most minute particulars to that effect.’

“ ‘No, no, that is not the case. I lost my head. I beg of you, gentlemen, not to believe that I confessed. I am innocent, innocent, completely innocent.’

“ ‘I will read the report of the interrogatory of the prisoner by the examining magistrate. The jury will be able to judge for themselves.’ The President reads said report: ‘Jean Torquenié admits that, having left his domicile at midnight on the 25th April, after having said that he would be away from home the whole of next day, he came back at about four in the morning. He called out to his wife, who did not answer him. Thereupon he put his shoulder to the lock and forced the door. At the very moment he entered the house he heard the sound of a heavy body dropping from some height into the garden. Daylight was just breaking, which enabled him to see a man getting over the hedge. He snatched up his carabine, which had been kept ready loaded for some time, and went in pursuit of the man. The latter could only proceed with difficulty along the newly ploughed fields, having had no time to tie his shoes. Torquenié went round by Le Bocage, and took up his station by “The Cat’s Hole” to wait for the man whom he had recognised as being the Viscount de Mortrée.

“ ‘The moment the Viscount got over the bank Torquenié fired, and the latter fell stark dead. When Torquenié found that public rumour pointed to him as the assassin, when he found that the authorities had searched his domicile, he lost his head, and prompted as much by revenge as by the wish to get

rid of an awkward witness, he poisoned Marianne with phosphorus.'

"The President adds that the confession has been dragged from the prisoner word by word by the magistrate entrusted with the preliminary investigation, who has shown a perseverance and tenacity deserving of the highest praise.

"When the President has finished reading, the prisoner, who has listened to him with a bewildered look, starts up excitedly and cries out—

"'But I did not say all this. It is impossible that I could have said this. I do not remember a word of it. Gentlemen, gentlemen, I must have been mad. I wanted to hurry on my trial, and I simply said "Yes" to everything they asked me. Six months of imprisonment, six months of solitary confinement, of brow-beating, of ill-treatment. But, by heaven, I am innocent for all that.

"The prisoner drops back in his seat, gasping for breath. The President asks him one or two more questions, to which he does not reply.

"The President: 'It is useless to prolong this interrogatory. After having confessed to his crime during the preliminary investigation, and having given the most circumstantial particulars, the prisoner retracts his statements to-day. That system of defence is not likely to succeed, and the prisoner would do better to renew his confession and to throw himself on the mercy of the jury. We will now proceed with the examination of the witnesses.'

"Several witnesses give their evidence.

"Jacqueline Frère was washing linen at the pump which is close to the gamekeeper's lodge on the day that the Viscount de Mortrée was in the kitchen with Marianne, who was mulling some wine for him, when she saw Jean Torquenié go into his domicile. The window was open. When the Viscount was gone she heard the prisoner reprimand his wife for having received the young man.

"Martin Brévant, farmer, deposes to having met Jean Torquenié two days before the crime. He was seated by the roadside and had his gun between his legs. He seemed low-spirited and crestfallen. The witness is under the impression that he talked of death and vengeance.

"Maître Rousseau: 'This is the first time the witness mentions this detail. In the summary of the indictment there is no mention of any words uttered by Jean Torquenié.'

"The President: 'The witness may have remembered the incident afterwards.'

"Maître Rousseau: 'I wish to draw the attention of the jury to the fact that the witness appears to be in an advanced state of intoxication.'

"Marie Alabrègne, farm servant, deposes to having met Jean Torquenié on the same day and at the same spot as the former witness, and that in reply to a joke on her part, the witness said, 'Your Viscount, I should like to see him under this sod,' while he angrily stamped on the ground with his feet.

"Pierre Desplas, horse-clipper, says that he lodged one day and one night at the lodge of Count de Trémeillon's gamekeeper. He was awakened from his sleep by the sound of voices in the room where Jean Torquenié and his wife slept. They seemed to be quarrelling and he listened. Torquenié accused his wife of no longer caring for him. He also reproached her with her love of admiration and wound up by telling her that if that kind of thing went on much longer, he would do something desperate.

"The President: 'Witness, I suppose you understand the very serious nature of your evidence. You are sure of having heard those words?'

"Witness: 'Yes, Monsieur le Président.'

"Maître Rousseau: 'Torquenié meant that if his

life became too great a burden to him, he would be capable of doing something desperate.'

"'This is a very specious interpretation, Maître Rousseau, but the jury will be able to judge which is the correct one.'

"The prisoner, greatly excited: 'Yes, yes, that is what I really meant. I felt indignant at the tales that were told about us. I remember having wept like a child on Marianne's breast, and having said to her, "If you left off caring for me, I would kill myself."'

"The President: 'Or else, that you would kill her.'

"The prisoner utters a cry, hides his face in both hands, and breaks into sobs.

"Maître Rousseau: 'I beg of you, Monsieur le Président, to have pity on this man. Allow me to point out to you once more that he is not condemned as yet. Consequently it is not a guilty man you have before you, but a man charged with a crime, and the way you examine him——'

"'I will not permit prisoner's counsel to call the President's impartiality in question. This is the second time that he interfered to criticise the manner in which the examination is conducted. I beg of him to spare me a third remark.'

"'I will protest each time it is necessary. This is my duty and I shall not shrink from it.'

"'Maître Rousseau, the Court and the jury will not be influenced by your violence.'

"'I hope, Monsieur le Président, that they will neither be influenced by your partiality.'

"After this incident, which produces a deep impression on the audience, the Court adjourns for a few minutes.

"On the trial being resumed, the President complains with great moderation and dignity of the unjust attacks to which he has been exposed on the part of the defence. He has presided at a great

number of assize trials, and this is the first time his impartiality has been called into question. Personally, he pays no heed to such calumnies, which may be excused, perhaps, on the ground of the desperate situation of a client whose legal defender endeavours to save his head by all means.

“Maitre Rousseau replies that he will not again interrupt the examination. He does not know whether his client’s head is at stake, and the President has no business to know it any more than he does, seeing that as yet the jury have not given their verdict. He will confine himself to putting the necessary questions to the witnesses, and reserve his appreciations of the manner in which the preliminary investigation and the trial have been conducted for his address to the jury.

“Examination of witnesses continued.

“La Terreuse is sworn.

“The appearance of this woman at the witness-bar* causes a certain amount of excitement. Her antecedents, her character, are calculated to arouse a feeling of curiosity. Her family have all been in the service of that of the Count de Trémeillan. Her father perished on the scaffold with the grandfather of the actual Count. La Terreuse’s character is a sombre and fanatical one; people in the neighbourhood look upon her as half mad. In 1832 she accompanied the Count to La Vendée, where the latter went to join the rising in favour of the Duchesse de Berry. She took the command of a band of *Chouans*. She did her share of the fighting, and for months remained in hiding in a wood, where she lived in a kind of lair like a wild animal. Hence the *sobriquet* her companions gave her, and which has stuck to her since.†

* There is no witness-box in France, but a bar.—*Transl.*

† *Terreux*, feminine *Terreuse*, is the adjective of *terre*, earth, meaning of the earth, smelling of the earth or soil.—*Transl.*

“The woman is below the middle height, sturdy and thick set. She holds herself up well. From beneath her headdress peep two plain bands of black hair, scarcely tinged with grey, which make, as it were, a hard frame round an unprepossessing and commonplace face. Her bright eyes boldly stare from beneath the bushy eyebrows at the judge and jury. Her yellow skin, low forehead, prominent jaw, and thick lips give one the impression that she has black blood in her veins, and that she descends from some savage African tribe.

“Her answers to the President’s questions are given in a slow, deliberate way, as if aware of the importance of her statements. Her voice is both harsh and hoarse.

“It was she who, on the morning of the 26th of April, on passing by the lodge, informed Marianne of the discovery, in one of the adjacent roads, of Viscount Mortrée’s body, shot through the head.

“On being told, Marianne uttered a loud cry, and fainted on her own doorstep. She carried her inside and put her to bed. About an hour afterward Jean Torquenié came back. He looked nervous and low-spirited. He scarcely paid attention to la Terreuse, when she told him that his wife was not well, and went straight to a basin of water, in which he washed his hands. He had no gun, only a stick. La Terreuse asked him where he came from, and he told her that he had been since early morning in the Gièvres wood.—‘Without your gun?’ asked la Terreuse. To which Jean Torquenié made no answer, and turned his back on her.

“The prisoner: ‘It is a falsehood. There is not a word of truth in it.’

“The President: ‘Prisoner, I must ask you not to interrupt the witness. This woman has been all her life a model of honesty and devotion. She has no interest whatsoever in misstating the truth. Her sincere and deeply-rooted religious sentiments make

her fully understand the serious nature of her oath to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth.'

"The prisoner: 'She has told a lie, gentlemen: this woman is telling a lie (turning to the witness). Jouannette, why do not you tell the truth? When I came in, I had my gun with me, my double-barrelled gun. When I heard that Marianne was not well, I ran to the bedstead. I did not wash my hands, and I did not tell you that I had been on duty since early morn in the Gièvres wood. You are either telling a lie, or you do not remember. Just try to remember. Why don't you say that I helped to nurse Marianne, and that by the way I did nurse her, anyone might see that I loved my wife.'

"La Terreuse looks fixedly at the prisoner for a moment; then she turns to the President: 'I swear that I have told the truth,' she says, in a firm voice.

"The President tells her to go on.

" 'I nursed Marianne for three weeks. I came every day, I brought her milk, and also attended to her baby. In short, I did all I could for her, because M. le Curé always recommends us to help your neighbour in his troubles. She was down with fever. She often lost her head, and talked at random.'

" 'Do you remember any of her words?'

" 'Yes, she often spoke of Marcellin. (Sensation in Court.) She often spoke as if afraid of her husband. "Take care," she used to say in that way, "he knows everything, and he will kill us." And then she began to yell loud enough to break one's heart.'

" 'The authorities searched the lodge while you were with Marianne?'

" 'Yes, Monsieur le Président; but she took no notice of them. She was too feverish.'

" 'How did the prisoner behave during that search?'

" 'He seemed very much afraid; his teeth were chattering all the while.'

“‘Tell us how Marianne grew worse, and how she died.’

“‘It was in this way, and about the middle of May. She had been a good deal better for four or five days before that. She had been able to sit up for a little while, and to take some nourishment. Still, every now and then during the day she shook all over, in an odd way, like this. (The witness shakes herself violently.) She seemed to be very terribly afraid of something; she sat down in a chair in the garden and played with her little girl, but she did not talk of her fear.’

“‘On what footing was she with her husband?’

“‘She avoided looking at him, and did not answer him when he tried to talk to her.’

“‘The prisoner makes violent signs of denial.

“‘La Terreuse takes no heed of this, but goes on. ‘Still, she was not aware of the authorities having been to the lodge, and that Jean Torquenié was suspected of having killed the Viscount. True, several women of the neighbourhood had been prowling about the place, and tried to come in and have a talk with her. But I kept the vipers away. I did not want the poor woman to know what they said about her husband. It might have killed her there and then, although I saw well enough by her looks that she knew more about the affair than people suspected, and that she suspected a good deal more than she knew, save that the authorities had been in the lodge. One evening she complained of pains in the stomach and in the bowels. She had taken some food during the day. She had taken some beef-tea.’

“‘It was you who made it?’

“‘Yes, Monsieur le Président.’

“‘Was Torquenié present?’

“‘He was in the house at any rate. He came and went, and kept dodging round me.’

“‘Did he give her the beef-tea?’

“ ‘No. It was I. But I remember that, when I came back to the fireplace, after having been away for a moment, I was very surprised to find the lid on the saucepan. I even said to Torquenié, “You should not have covered it up. It might all have boiled away.” ’ ”

“ The President : ‘Gentlemen of the jury, I need scarcely point out to you the importance of this piece of evidence. The prisoner came near the fireplace when some food was being prepared for his wife. She died the following night. Torquenié, do you recollect this incident ? Do you admit having touched the saucepan in which la Terreuse was making some beef-tea ? ’ ”

“ ‘All that this woman says is a lie from beginning to end.’ And Torquenié once more hides his face in his hand and appears utterly crushed.

“ At the request of the President the witness proceeds to give her evidence.

“ ‘Towards nine o’clock at night Marianne’s pains became more violent. She was twisting and tearing her sheets, she flung up her hands, which were like claws, and her shrieks were more like howls. I should think people could have heard her half a mile off. Torquenié closed the window.’ ”

“ ‘How did he behave during Marianne’s agony ? ’ ”

“ ‘He seemed very much upset. He was running about like mad. He flung himself down at the foot of the bed and shrieked : “Marianne, I ask your pardon.” ’ ”

“ The President to the prisoner : ‘Do you admit having made use of these words ? ’ ”

“ ‘I may have done so, Monsieur le Président (wiping the tears from off his face). I had been very wrong with regard to my wife. I had unjustly worried her with regard to the visits of the Viscount. When I found that she was so very ill it is but natural that I should have asked her pardon.’ ”

"The President requests the witness to proceed.

"La Terreuse: 'Marianne grew worse and worse. There was a wild look in her eyes, she seemed mad. I have never seen anything so terrible in my life. She flung herself about the bed, she seemed as if she would like to tear the flesh off her body with both hands; she seemed as if she had swallowed a bar of red hot iron.'

"The President to the prisoner: 'Why, when your wife was so ill, did not you send for a doctor?'

"'But I did send for one, Monsieur le Président. La Terreuse can tell you. Do you remember, Jouannette, my having asked you to run into the town for Monsieur Barthélemy. You went out, and when you came back you told me that you sent a labourer who was passing, because at that moment neither you nor I could leave Marianne?'

"La Terreuse (firmly): 'I do not remember that.'

"The President: 'At what time did Marianne die?'

"'About ten. Poor woman, she did not last long. The wretch made her swallow a very strong dose.'

"'Did the prisoner seem at all affected by her death?'

"'Yes, he wept.'

"'Very well, you may stand down.'

"One or two more witnesses are examined, but their evidence is of no importance. We may, however notice that of the Count de Trémeillan, who has wished to show his interest in his former keeper by testifying to his interest and devotion while he was in his service. 'He was an excellent servant,' he said.

"The examination of the witnesses having concluded, Advocate-General Aymard addresses the jury for the prosecution. Monsieur Aymard's speech is very firm and energetic.

"He begins by referring to the youth and antecedents of the prisoner. He was very quick and

intelligent, but his character was a difficult one to deal with. The late Count had him educated above his station, and allowed him to share the lessons of one of his sons. This generosity on the part of the deceased nobleman seems to have been a mistake.

“‘For [it is a mistake,’ says the eloquent spokesman for the prosecution, ‘to confer the high advantages of education on the lower classes of society. It leads to the development of instincts and appetites which are often dangerous. The seeds of envy and jealousy are sown in the hearts of inexperienced natures; they develop later on and become a danger to society. In the higher spheres education enlightens, in the lower it throws men in the darkness of hatred and envy.’

“Turning from these general remarks, the counsel for the prosecution reviews the facts brought to light. Without dwelling upon the admissions of the prisoner during the preliminary investigations, admissions in which he ought to have persisted at the trial, for in that case the jury might have been influenced by his repentance, there are against the prisoner a series of proofs so strong as to make his guilt as clear as daylight.

“The counsel for the prosecution recapitulates the facts already known, marshals the evidence of the witnesses, and above all lays great stress on that of la Terreuse, ‘that model of loyalty and honour, that brave servant of the bravest of masters.’ He shows that the first crime was premeditated, that Jean Torquenié had shown his intention of ridding himself of the Viscount de Mortrée. He proves that the poisoning of Marianne has been the consequence of that first crime and that the gamekeeper wanted and to take his revenge upon the unhappy woman for his injured honour, and to suppress an awkward witness.

“Nevertheless the prosecution admits that there are extenuating circumstances to be invoked in

favour of the prisoner. He has received the greatest insult a man can receive. He has been cruelly deceived by the woman he loved. Whatever the horror inspired by the two crimes one cannot help pitying the poor, unfortunate man to a certain extent.

"Hence, society will not ask him for a rigorous account of the blood he has shed. It will not ask a life for a life. It will show its mercy and save that head threatened by the 'sword of justice.' Nevertheless, the penalty should be a severe one, and the prosecution demands a sentence of twenty years' penal servitude.

"At the request of the President the counsel for the defence rises to address the Court. There is a sudden stir of excitement among the audience. Maître Rousseau is known to be one of the young lights of the Rennes Bar; he is credited with a great deal of talent and eloquence, and his attitude during the proceedings has bred the expectations of a vehement onslaught on the prosecution. It is said that he is convinced of his client's innocence, and that he means to plead for an acquittal.

"In reply to the President's permission, he rises quickly to his legs, and in a clear and incisive voice he disputes inch by inch the assertions of the prosecution. He will not reply to the theories of the honourable magistrate concerning the benefits of education for the people. The thing seems to him to have no bearing upon the question. This much he may be allowed to say, that if Torquenié had been ignorant he would no doubt have been confronted by an Advocate-General who would have affirmed that this ignorance had brought him to the prisoner's dock. He tries to prove that his client never had the morose and savage character with which he has been credited. In support of his assertion he reads a letter from the tutor of the son of the late Count de Trémeillan and of the son of the late game-keeper. The document speaks in high terms of the

prisoner's good qualities, of his gentleness and obedience.

"Some witnesses have testified to his client's rough ways and hard-heartedness. Maître Rousseau challenges the prosecution to produce the reports of the police on the antecedents of those witnesses, and it will be found that they have all been prosecuted for poaching in consequence of Jean Torquenié's reports, who was extremely severe in the execution of his duty.

"'You have been told, gentlemen, that Jean Torquenié had no heart,' the young barrister goes on. 'It is a pity that I cannot describe to you all the phases of the short love story in which the unfortunate man put forth his whole soul. It is a pity that I cannot read you all the letters he wrote to his cherished Marianne. Because, if I could, you would get a better insight into the character of the man with whom to-day you are confronted.

"'I consider it high time also to do away with the odious story that injures Marianne's character and exposes her memory to the most infamous suspicions. In lifting my voice to-day, gentlemen, in defence of that memory, I merely comply with one of the most constant preoccupations of my client. If you behold him crushed and despondent in the position to which he has been brought by some cruel, inexplicable fate, if you behold his tear-stained face, if you hear him choking with sobs, do not attribute these signs of despair to moral weakness, to a base fear of the future lot in store for him. Jean Torquenié has no fear as far as he himself is concerned.

"'When I proposed to him to take up his defence, for the offer came spontaneously from me, he at first refused. "No," he said; "I feel that I am condemned beforehand. I have some powerful enemy who has encompassed my ruin. I am a lost man." Then he seemed to reflect, and after a few moments he changed his mind. "I accept, Monsieur, I accept," he said

eagerly. "You shall speak to the Court. But you will leave me out of the question. Leave me to my fate. Speak to them of Marianne. Tell them that all the stories about her are simply so many infamous slanders; tell them that she loved me, that I worshipped her, and that, if at present I am so utterly indifferent about my fate, it is because life can only be a long agony to me, seeing that I lost everything that could make it a happy one when I lost Marianne." And just now, when I rose to address you, the unhappy man, while the tears ran down his cheeks, whispered once more to me, "Defend her, Monsieur, defend her."

"And, gentlemen, I am going to defend her. I will ask you to dismiss from your minds for a moment or so all you have heard for the last three hours. Follow me in your imagination to a brighter spot than this Court, to that pretty country around Bonnières where the meads are so green and the water of the stream so bright and transparent. It is a peaceful and happy spot. Verdure everywhere, and peeping from it the turrets of "d'Albrays," the roofs of the Marnes Manor, and a little further on, the dazzling white walls of Mesnil. A handsome young couple, scarcely more than children, are strolling by the river's banks. They dream of love and of the future. They are so engrossed with one another, they are so intoxicated with their own words that they do not notice the decline of day, the sun slowly disappearing behind the horizon. They linger and linger on, loth to part. All at once the girl seems to start from a dream.

"What, is it getting dark already, and must you go?" she sighs. And after having left her hands unresistingly to the young fellow, who covers them with kisses, after having promised him faithfully to be next day at the same hour at the same spot, she slips away with bounding step and a light heart.

“ ‘For a long while the young fellow gazes after her, smiles and kisses his hands to her. Then, when at a bend of the road, she disappears, he opens his hand which contains a letter she put into it before she went.

“ ‘Quivering with joy the young fellow leans against a tree and reads the lines so full of bliss to him.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘My dearly beloved,—I saw that you were sad to-day and that is why I write to you. Let me beg of you not to lose heart. Your parents do not want me for their daughter-in-law, because I am poor and have no other wealth to give you than my love. But this love will be so great, so loyal, that they will be touched by it in the end.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘Yes, I love you and have loved you for a long while. Do you remember? I have loved since the day we danced together at the *fête* of Bourrée. I love you so dearly, that often in thinking of you, I feel inclined to cry. It seems to me that my heart melts when I hear your name mentioned. Oh, if your parents could but know of this love, they would not refuse a girl who only asks to love them also, and to devote herself to them. They have been told that I am a *coquette*, that I like to dress myself up, and they are afraid. Ah, my dearly beloved, if they could read in my heart they would see that I would willingly give up dress and everything else for a single one of your sweet and affectionate words, and that I would willingly accept the greatest poverty if I could not be your wife except on that condition. Trust in me. I shall never give you up. I have never loved anyone but you, and you may trust for ever in the love of your MARIANNE.”

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘Well, gentlemen of the jury, I could read you a dozen letters like this, and the spirit of affectionate devotion breathing through every one of them could not fail to touch your hearts. You will understand, then, that Marianne was sincere in saying that she had never loved until she bestowed her heart upon

Jean Torquenié, and assuring him that she should never love anyone but him.

“‘And this, gentlemen, is the woman held up to you as vain, flighty, sufficiently forgetful of her duties to fall after two years of a marriage which had been the ambition and dream of her young life.

“‘You have been asked to give credence to witnesses chosen among those who had cause to complain of the gamekeeper’s rigorous sense of duty. Why did not the prosecution call others? They would have testified to the affectionate union prevailing in the gamekeeper’s lodge, to Jean Torquenié’s love for his wife and his little daughter, to the unalloyed happiness one might have read in their faces.’

“Maître Rousseau proceeds to read a letter from the Countess de Trémeillan, whose foster-sister Marianne was, and in which she, the Countess, says that there was not a better, gentler, and more devoted creature on the face of the earth, and that her death has caused her intense sorrow.

“Maître Rousseau furthermore points out that the indictment contains a great mistake in contending that the marriage of Jean Torquenié with Marianne was opposed by the former’s parents on the ground that Marianne had either been engaged to, or had had some doubtful relations with, another young man. The real reason of that opposition was the poverty of the young girl. And as soon as that obstacle was removed through the generosity of the Countess de Trémeillan, the marriage of the two young people took place.

“He then deals with the principal point of the indictment—the appearance upon the scene of the Count de Mortrée, and the subsequent frequent walks of the young nobleman in the vicinity of ‘d’Albrays.’

“‘Gentlemen, allow me once more to re-establish

the truth which has been strangely misrepresented both in the preliminary investigation and in the indictment that was read to you. The truth lies in the words uttered a little while ago by the prisoner, which he has reiterated over and over again in the interviews I had with him. He has never, absolutely never, been jealous of Marianne. He was absolutely sure of her affection; he would never have wronged her by as much as the least suspicion. But he knew the evil tongues of country people; he knew that he had enemies among those whom he had prosecuted in the exercise of his duty, and he did not want a single unbecoming word said that could tarnish the purity of the woman he worshipped. That is why he asked Marianne on several occasions to keep the Viscount out of the house. But strong in the consciousness of her honesty she merely laughed at his fears, and she felt herself so much above slander that she scorned all precaution. "If it pleases the Viscount to come and take his walks about here," she said, "we cannot prevent him, and if he drops in now and then we cannot show him the cold shoulder in order to satisfy the scandal-mongers of the neighbourhood." There is no doubt that they had some little tiffs on the subject, but they were of no account, and generally ended by a kiss.

"We are confronted by three pieces of evidence; that of a man who saw Jean Torquenié seated by the roadside with tears in his eyes and a wild look in his face. You cannot have failed to notice, gentlemen, that this man is in the habit of giving way to drink. He may have been in a muddled state the day he saw Jean Torquenié. Jean Torquenié admits having said to the woman Alabrègne, in stamping on the ground, "Your Viscount, I should like to see him lying under this sod." But the words were said in a fit of temper and to shut the mouth of the aggravating woman who constituted herself the echo of the

spiteful tittle-tattle that had been going on for some time in the neighbourhood. He never attached the slightest importance to the words. He merely wanted to convey the fact of his being anxious to get rid of the worry caused by the absurd malicious rumours spread by some village gossips.

“ ‘ Pierre Desplas declared that he heard Jean Torquenié and his wife quarrel with one another during the night. Nay, according to the witness, the gamekeeper is supposed to have shouted, “ If this goes on much longer I’ll do something desperate.” You have heard the complexion put upon these words by my client himself. He complained vehemently of the unaccountable slanders spread about them, and said sorrowfully, “ If such a misfortune happened to me, I would not be long of this world ; I should do something dreadful, that is something desperate.”

“ ‘ Hence I beg you to believe, gentlemen, that Jean Torquenié had no cause to be jealous of his wife. Marianne loved him ; he felt convinced that not for a single moment had she ceased to be worthy of him. Consequently I maintain that it is not Jean Torquenié who killed Viscount Marcellin. Who is the real assassin ? It is not my business to find out. A dense mystery surrounds the whole of this wretched affair ; but I am thoroughly convinced that the crime was committed by someone who wished to avert suspicion and divert it to my client, the unfortunate gamekeeper. I am prepared to admit that Viscount de Mortrée was killed with Jean Torquenié’s carabine, but I maintain that it was not Torquenié who fired the shot. I admit that Marianne died by poison, but my inmost conviction tells me plainly that it was not Torquenié who administered or prepared the poison.

“ ‘ You will tell me, gentlemen, that he has confessed to having done both. I am treading on very dangerous ground. My words prompted by my

conscience are likely to raise ardent protests. But it is my duty to speak out, and speak out I will.

“Gentlemen, I yield to no one in my love and respect for the magistracy of the land. I sincerely admit the worth and talents of the eminent men who spend their best mental efforts, their heart's devotion in the cause of what they believe to be true and just. But like every other human institution, the magistracy may have its defects. The principal defect of our institutions is the deliberate animosity often shown by the examining magistrate against the man who is confronted with him under the charge of a mere offence or of a crime. The moment that poor wretch comes face to face with him the judge becomes his enemy.’

“The President: ‘Maître Rousseau, I cannot allow such terms to be used here. You insult the magistracy you pretend to respect. I must request you to choose another basis for your defence.’

“Maître Rousseau: ‘Monsieur le Président, I foresaw the possibility of my words being open to discussion, but I did not expect a remark which positively aims at the most sacred privileges of the counsel for the defence. The moment I am debarred from taking a certain line of argument, I can but submit and be silent. I shall simply sum up my facts, and I beg the Court to take note that my speech has been interrupted, and that I have had to leave this bar.’ Saying which, Maître Rousseau sits down and puts on his *biretta*. A great number of his fellow-barristers crowd round and shake hands with him.

“The President, after having consulted his fellow-judges: ‘Maître Rousseau, please to rise and continue your speech. The Court will listen to what you have to say. The magistracy is above all insinuations and insults.’

“Maître Rousseau: ‘I do not insult, I merely state; I do not insinuate, I prove. I shall say

everything I have to say openly, because I am of opinion that it will contain a salutary truth, and that a deep and valuable lesson is to be derived from this trial. I will continue my remarks, but I declare beforehand that I shall take my straightforward course, without taking heed of any prejudices I may offend.

“Gentlemen of the Jury, I address myself above all to you. When a man is arraigned before you here, you listen to the indictment, to the examination, to the defence, then you give your verdict according to your conscience. If you are told the man has confessed to his crime you let the law take its course. You are not troubled with any uneasiness or remorse on the subject.

“But you never ask yourself about the scenes that have preceded the conclusion of the drama which you are now witnessing. You do not know what has occurred between the moment when the suspected man has been arrested, and the moment when he appears before you to be judged.

“Gentlemen, we are now in the middle of November. It was the middle of May when this poor unfortunate man was flung into prison. Six months have elapsed, six months of so-called remand, during which he has not had a moment's peace. The judge entrusted with “the getting up of the case,” with the preliminary investigations, and whose name I do not care to mention, appears to have made up his mind from the very first day. According to him Torquenié was guilty, consequently by hook and by crook Torquenié had to be made to confess. This was the sole aim he pursued with a vigour, with a tenacity, which elicited praise a few moments ago from one of the honourable magistrates, but which I prefer not to qualify with any terms.

“Gentlemen, I may just as well say everything that is on my mind. This magistrate has displayed the most relentless severity against my client. It has

come to my knowledge that he went to the head warder of the prison, and asked him to reduce the diet of the prisoner in order to weaken him in body and to make him less stubborn. (Sensation in Court.) He worried him day after day with long examinations, in which he simply tortured him in every way. He even went so far as to prompt the witnesses as to what they should do, so as to catch the prisoner within the meshes of proofs from which he could not escape.

“Jean Torquenié struggled bravely; he defended himself for four weary months, he vindicated the memory of Marianne, he protested that he was innocent. But human strength also has its limits. Conquered, mentally and bodily enervated, no longer able to control himself, borne down by so much moral and physical torture, Torquenié asked one morning to be taken to the examining magistrate. The latter had warned him that he would not be tried until his affair had been thoroughly sifted, which meant until he had confessed. The unfortunate man wanted to have done with it. He had struggled for a long while to save his head from the guillotine, to defend Marianne’s honour, but his strength was spent, and he surrendered. He had made up his mind to accept any and everything, to be condemned, to have his name branded with infamy, but he could no longer bear the tortures inflicted upon him. He has said “yes” and “amen” to all the questions which it pleased the judge to put to him. That, gentlemen, is how Jean Torquenié was brought to confess his double crime.’

“This part of Maître Rousseau’s speech produces a rather keen impression on the audience. But the accusations appear singularly exaggerated, and the charges against one of the most enlightened and upright magistrates of the Rennes Court are listened to with a smile of doubt by many people, even by some of his colleagues at the bar.

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“They are looked upon as a last and bold effort to save his client. The barrister concludes by asking the jury to acquit the prisoner.

“The President’s summing up is impartial throughout. He energetically protests against the strange accusation by which the counsel for the defence has seen fit to wind up his speech. If the preliminary formalities have been protracted at all, it was because the affair was surrounded by a great deal of mystery, and because the magistrate entrusted with its investigation was anxious to bring to light every particular. He succeeded thoroughly, and it is a wretched system of defence to pretend that the prisoner was not a free agent, and that the confession of his guilt was wrung from him by force and pressure, that odious means were resorted to obtain his avowal. The President, in vindication of the honour of the magistracy, formally denies all such allegations, and expresses his regret that a member of the bar should have repeated the slanderous assertions evolved from the brain of a criminal.

“After the summing up, the jury retire to their own room. They return in about an hour and return a verdict of guilty on both counts, but recommend the prisoner to mercy on account of extenuating circumstances.

“In consideration whereof Jean Torquenié is sentenced to twenty years’ penal servitude. On hearing his sentence, the prisoner utters a heart-rending moan, and falls back almost unconscious. He is carried away by the gendarmes.

“Maître Rousseau gets up and says, in a loud voice, ‘Gentlemen, you have condemned an innocent man.’”

CHAPTER IX.

ALMOST before daybreak, on the same morning, Armand d'Arcay came into Gérard's room.

"Well," he asked, sitting down on his bed, "have you read the trial?"

The young painter rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and did not answer for a moment or so.

"Wait, wait, and let me think for a moment," he said. "Let me see, where am I? In Rennes, that's all right. What trial are you alluding to? Oh, I've got it. Ye gods! do you know that I felt vastly interested in that trial," he said, thoroughly awake this time, and getting into a sitting posture." There is a president in it who strikes me as a regular old humbug, and a capital lawyer fellow, whom I should like to shake by the hand."

"You judge that kind of thing as an artist!" said Armand, somewhat huffed at the way his friend expressed himself on the subject of a respectable judge of the Rennes bench. "As for the barrister to whom you allude, he was a very poor creature. He lived with a woman by whom he had a child.

"The deuce he did," said Gérard, scarcely able to suppress a smile.

"But that is not the question. You have not given me your opinion of the trial. The man was guilty, was not he?" he asked with evident anxiety.

"How long is it since you read the account of that trial?" asked Gérard, without replying to his friend's questions.

"Oh! a long while ago. I was very young when

I went through the files of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. About fifteen I should say."

"In that case, my dear Armand, I should advise you to go over them again." Then he went on in a very serious tone: "My dear Armand, you are asking me seriously, because you are a loyal and upright fellow, and because you do not wish to entertain the shadow of a doubt about this grave affair in which your father played so important a part. Well, let me tell of a fact that greatly struck me. After I had finished reading the account of the trial, and while still under the influence of what I had read, I was turning over the leaves of the volume, which is a very thick one and contains more than one year's issue, when I came by accident on a paragraph inserted in 1850. There were but a few lines, but they referred to the terrible accident that had happened to your father. I am unable to say why I should have been struck by a connection between these two dates, between these two events. May I frankly tell you all I think, my dear Armand?"

"Go on," said the young barrister, sadly. "I guess what you are driving at."

"Monsieur d'Arcay was taken ill in 1850," said Gérard, in a low and halting voice. "How do we know but that in 1847—the year of the trial—he may already have been affected by the terrible malady which terminated his life in so painful a manner. How do we know that he was not already then under the influence of that morbid excitement, that he was not suffering from a mania for persecution, of which this poor Torquenié became the victim?"

"The same thought struck me last night," said Armand, placing his feverishly-hot hand on his friend's arm. "And I cannot tell you how the thought tortures me." The young fellow hid his face in both hands and seemed thoroughly crushed.

"I almost regret," he went on after a while, "that

I sent the man away. I will have him looked for to-day in the town, and have another interview with him. I will ask him to repeat word for word my father's examination of him, the particulars of which must be still present to his mind."

"The man is gone," said Gérard, and then he told his friend of what had occurred but a few hours previously at the little eyot near the mills.

When he had done telling him, Armand sat for some time silent and quite still. It was evident that a cruel struggle was going on in his mind. All of a sudden he raised his head. "There is one person in this town," he exclaimed, "who could give me some valuable information. I must go and see him." And he strode out of the room, evidently under the influence of intense excitement.

A few minutes later he knocked at the small door of a very modest tenement situated on the other side of the principal Law Courts.

A woman opened the door to him. He inquired whether he could see Monsieur Loiseau. At her reply in the affirmative, he went along a dark and damp passage, leading to a small room at the further end of the house, and whose windows looked out upon a narrow alley.

The moment he opened the door he was greeted by a deafening, strident noise. Three immense cages full of canaries were arranged against the walls. The window had also been transformed into a cage by means of a wire-grating placed inside and out, and in this improvised aviary there was another legion of canaries fluttering about. All these birds were mutually exciting one another to sing, and the sharp notes from their tiny throats horribly pierced the drums of the ears of the unfortunate creature that ventured among them.

In the centre of the room, at an oaken table, sat an old man quietly reading without appearing to

heed the chirping and twittering that exploded on all sides like so many squibs.

When he caught sight of Armand the old man took off his black skull cap and kept staring at him open mouthed, as if thoroughly amazed at the visit.

"I have not seen you for a very long while, my dear Monsieur Loiseau," said Armand, taking the chair which the old man offered him.

"And it is very kind of you to have come to see me in my solitude, Monsieur d'Arcay. I have not been out for nearly ten years, since the misfortune that befell me. My poor little girl—my poor Bridget! But from the window that looks on the square, I often saw you pass. I noticed your growing taller and into manhood, and I said to myself how happy your father would have been if he could have seen you like this."

"I know you were very attached to my father," said Armand.

"Of course, my dear Monsieur, when people work together for many long years, they at last become attached to one another. I had a profound respect for your father, and he on his side was very well disposed towards his trusty clerk."

"You held the position of *greffier* a long while, did not you, dear Monsieur Loiseau?"

"For fifteen years, Monsieur."

"And you retired ten years ago?"

"Yes, Monsieur, after the death of my dear little girl."

At that point of the conversation, the canaries, excited by the sound of a strange voice, chirped louder than ever, and to a degree such as to compel Monsieur Loiseau to fetch several large black cloths, with which he covered the cages.

"I hope you will excuse them, the poor dears," said the old man, resuming his seat; "they are not used to visitors. You are surprised perhaps at my living among these birds, the only companions of my

solitude. But the fact is," he went on, visibly affected, "my dear little one when she died recommended me to take care of two canaries of which she was very fond. I have taken such good care of them and looked after their offspring with such solicitude that at present I find myself at the head of an establishment of more than two hundred birds. They are somewhat noisy now and again; but I always imagine that my little one is listening to their song from on high, and I never complain that they chirp too loudly."

Armand let the clerk chew the cud of his loving recollections, while he was cudgelling his brain for the means of leading the conversation to the subject that was uppermost in his mind, without arousing the suspicions of the old man as to the motive that prompted his questions.

Fortunately chance befriended him, for all at once a dark-complexioned head appeared at the other side of the window, behind the twittering birds, and a hand was held out for charity.

"So the police have not done away yet with this bad lot," mumbled the erstwhile clerk, casting an angry look at the beggar girl. "It is a positive disgrace to be begging at her time of life; and the more so, seeing that she has a trade; she is at Breton's cloth works, but she prefers hanging about the streets to working for her living."

"Who is this girl?" asked Armand.

"That," said the old man, in a tone of contempt, "that is the daughter of a scoundrel whom your father had put away. A fellow by the name of Torquenié. The affair made a great deal of noise at the time."

"It was about a twelvemonth before my father fell ill, was not it?" asked Armand, trying to hide his emotion.

The girl, seeing that every window remained closed, went her way with a listless and indolent sleep.

"No; two or three years, I think," replied the old man. "But even at that time he was far from feeling well."

"Oh, indeed," said Armand, whose heart beat violently.

"You see," the old man went on, "he worked too hard. He put his heart and soul too much in things; that is what has killed him. That affair gave him a great deal of trouble. He had to deal with a very shifty customer, who would not confess. At times, during the examination, I have seen him turn as red as fire. He looked as if he were going to have a stroke of apoplexy. I recollect, one day, though I paid no attention to it at the moment, but I remembered it afterwards; I recollect, one day, his getting up while he was questioning the man and rushing to the mantelpiece. He took the timepiece in both hands and carried it to the balcony, exclaiming, 'The noise in that thing is breaking my head.'

"On another occasion he went to fetch his gown, and put it on, saying to me, 'He does not confess, because he does not know who I am. But when he sees me in my gown he will be afraid, and tell me everything.'

"I laughed, because I thought he was joking, but when the terrible event happened I could not help thinking that the poor man had behaved very strangely for a long while."

Armand felt like confounded by what the old man told him. He dropped the subject, and talked to his father's former clerk about his birds and the flowers in his garden. Then he took his leave, without the old man having the slightest notion why the son of the erstwhile examining magistrate had come to trouble his solitude.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Armand got home, breakfast was on the table. Marguérite held up her forehead to be kissed, and said, "I trust, my dear Armand, that you will be in better spirits to-day, and that the sad expression of yesterday will have gone."

A new guest had arrived at Madame d'Arcay's: the Count de Trémeillan, who had returned from his business visit and come to take his daughter back to "d'Albrays."

The latter was just the same stern and freezing personage whom André remembered having met when a child. The painter looked at the delicately chiselled and aristocratic features, at the dull and expressionless eyes, at the thin and supercilious lips, and came to the conclusion that the lapse of years seemed to have had no effect on the cast-iron countenance of the Count de Trémeillan. Only his fair hair appeared to have lost some of its colour. Was this wonderful preservation due to the tranquil life the Count had led these many years? Or had the emotions of his youth, his political adventures, made an old man of him before his time, so that having an aged look when still young, he had preserved the same when getting old?

After breakfast he went away with Marguérite, and the lovers' temporary parting was a smiling and affectionate one. Armand promised to go and dine with his betrothed at "d'Albrays" next day.

"I say, Armand, your father-in-law elect is not at all lively," said Gérard, as the two young fellows were smoking their cigars in the garden.

"A very cold and stern disposition," remarked Armand.

"Yes, I should say so. A real icicle. Looks as if made out of snow."

"A man of very hard and fast principles. Notwithstanding this glacial appearance, he has gone through singular periods of enthusiasm. He joined the rising in the Vendée in favour of the Duchesse de Berry. He wore a dress copied on that of de la Roche-Jacquelin. As a matter of course, the blues, as the infantry of Louis-Philippe were called, made him prisoner almost at the very first moment. He would never adopt a disguise in order to get away. He aspired to the glory of being guillotined, instead of which he only got a few months of imprisonment."

"Poor man, you have only to look at him to see that he never got over the disappointment of not having been guillotined."

"Don't make a joke of it, my dear André. There is a more grave and serious reason for the sadness so plainly written on Monsieur Trémeillan's face. Years ago he suffered a most cruel bereavement, that of his wife whom he idolised, and who was a beautiful and saintly woman. He has never got over the blow."

Next day, Madame d'Arcay and her son went to dine at "d'Albrays." Count de Trémeillan's country-seat was situated in one of the most fertile and picturesque parts of Brittany, about six miles from Rennes.

Though wholly engrossed with his love for Marguerite, Armand could not help shuddering as the carriage, on entering the avenue, passed before a small tenement covered with ivy and surrounded with poplars. It was the gamekeeper's lodge. It was there that twenty years before had been enacted several scenes of the mysterious drama of which his mind had been full these three days. He pointed

out the humble dwelling to André Gérard. A few minutes later the carriage stopped at the front entrance. Marguérite, prettier than ever in her riding dress, which set off her shapely figure, ran forward to meet them. Her handsome eyes beamed with joy.

"I have just got off my horse," she said; "but if you will excuse me I shall be with you directly."

The Count de Trémeillan made his appearance at the top of the shallow flight of steps leading to the hall, and offered his arm to Madame d'Arcay. Marguérite left him to welcome their guests and ran to change her dress.

She had spoken truly; but a few moments sufficed to accomplish the transformation; and in an incredibly short time Mademoiselle de Trémeillan, wearing a cool Pompadour-flowered muslin, entered the grand drawing-room with a smile on her lips. There were several other guests besides the d'Arcay party, some of the Count's neighbours, and the old vicar of Bonnières who, pending dinner, was playing a game of backgammon with Monsieur de Rigny, the actual owner of "Les Marnes."

Marguérite had led Armand to the recess of a tall window. They stood looking at the horizon, which the waning sun was lighting up with strange brownish tints. The window stood open, and the fragrance of jasmine and mignonette embalmed the air. They did not speak, they were wrapt in a long love dream; earth and everything around them was forgotten; they were in a heaven of their own. They loved one another so intensely, they had loved one another so long already, and they could never look back upon their first meeting without being stirred to their inmost depths.

They had met in one of those sleepy hollows, downright nests of foliage and moss, where the stillness is only broken by the twittering of the birds and the ripple of the rivulet pursuing its lazy course through the grass.

Armand was only eighteen, and he had been delicate from his childhood. He was tall, thin, and pale, with bright eyes, but he stooped somewhat, and the doctor had recommended bodily exercise. Madame d'Arcay made him ride, take fencing lessons, and go out shooting. But when Armand went out shooting he always took a book in his bag, and the moment he got to a shady tree or a nice little brook, he sat down, put his gun against a little hillock, and spent his time in reading or in drawing until it was time to return.

One lovely September day Armand was "shooting" in that fashion, in one of the delightful Brittany hollows, when the silence all round was broken by the neighing of a horse.

He suddenly looked up and beheld a small grey pony, ridden by a young girl, who was certainly not more than fifteen. Seeing that Armand was lying right across the path the girl could not proceed without disturbing him. So Armand got up, took his gun out of the way, and lifted his cap. But the girl checked her horse, which was already on the move.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Monsieur, but will you please tell me the time?" she asked, without appearing the least embarrassed.

"It is four o'clock, Mademoiselle," replied the young fellow, taking out his watch,

"Then I have got two hours to get back, much more than I want," said Margu rite de Tr meillan. "Toby is very hot, and so am I," she added, pushing back her black curls which were tumbling over her forehead. "It is beautifully cool here, and I think I will stop a bit. You do not mind, Monsieur?"

And without waiting for his answer, she threw him the reins and jumped down.

"You were after the birds?" she asked of Armand, after having seated herself by his side.

Then she glanced at the empty bag, which was lying a few steps further away, and a somewhat ironical smile played on her rosy lips. "You are going back empty-handed?" she added. Then, lest she should have offended the young fellow, she went on—

"There is neither game nor bird down here. You must go higher up where they have been cutting the rye. There are lots of partridges. I am very fond of shooting. My father bought me a small gun this year, and in the morning I go out with the keeper in the park. I have already shot two rabbits." There was a kind of triumphant look on her face as she turned it on the young fellow.

Then they fell a-chatting. Armand confessed to having but little liking for bodily exertion. She asked him who he was, what he did, and so on. When he told her that he was just beginning to read for the law and that he was going to the bar, there was a slight deprecating pursing of the lips.

"If I had been a man," she said, "I should have liked to be a soldier."

When he told her his name, she clapped her hands for joy. "But you are a neighbour," she exclaimed. "Our grounds touch one another. I was almost going into your park the other day. There is a breach in the wall and a fox got through it. I wanted to go after it, but the keeper told me not to, for you might prosecute us for trespass."

Armand assured her that he would be delighted if she would come and shoot over his mother's ground.

"My father sees no one," she said, "he is very solitary, and I often feel very dull. I should be so glad if you were to come to us. You will see, I shall make you like shooting and riding. You'll ride Toby, he is very gentle, and I'll ride the black mare."

There was a kind of protecting look as she said this in a decided tone of voice, which was thoroughly delightful.

When she cantered away, for she had been out-

staying her time chatting, Armand felt a strange void. It seemed to him that the girl carried away part of himself.

They saw one another again, for Armand prevailed upon his mother to call upon their neighbour, the Count de Trémeillan. He pretended that there was a large and valuable library at "d'Albrays," which he would very much like to examine. Though Madame d'Arcay lived in strict retirement since her husband's terrible illness, she complied with her son's wish, and the intimacy that sprang up between the young people in consequence was intensely delightful to both. For though their characters were utterly dissimilar, they harmonised perfectly.

The Count de Trémeillan, who since the death of his wife seemed plunged into a constant state of reverie, paid little or no heed to his daughter. She had grown up free as air, without the least constraint. She was absolutely free from the intolerable awkwardness of young girls brought up in towns, and whose education up till twenty consists of a course of refined hypocrisy. Her disposition was a frank, spontaneous, and generous one, ignorant of all evil, consequently indulgent and good to a fault. But it was also an exquisitely affectionate one, suffering great'y from the utter solitude around her. Her mother died a few months after she was born. Her father frightened her, as it were, by his cold and reserved attitude.

The collapse of his political hopes, coupled with the death of his wife, had thrown the Count de Trémeillan into a state of sombre melancholy, which made his society a dull one to so young a girl, who was an enthusiast by nature, whose heart was beginning to speak, who was eager to love and to be loved.

That which her father could not, or would not, give her was made up by the love of Armand, which rewarded her a hundredfold for the want of affection

and the unaccountable indifference with which she had been treated from her infancy.

Madame d'Arcay had not been slow to notice her son's feelings with regard to their sweet neighbour. But seeing that she idolised Armand, and soon became aware of Marguérite's charming disposition, she encouraged rather than opposed this nascent affection.

Armand went every day to "d'Albrays," ostensibly to study in the big, black-joisted library which took up a whole wing of the building, in reality to spend long, long hours with Marguérite in the park. Count de Trémeillan did not concern himself about the doings of his daughter. But there was a guardian angel in the shape of the purest and most delicate love, which protected her better than half-a-dozen of the sternest *chaperones* or most rigid *duennas* could have done.

These young people loved one another without being aware even of the whole extent and power of the affection that bound them together. It wanted some untoward trial to open their eyes, and it came in the guise of a protracted and dangerous illness just when Armand had turned twenty. When Marguérite ceased to see him every day, when the impatient footstep no longer rang upon the marble flags of the great hall, when she had to take her solitary stroll under the spreading trees of the park, when the companion with whom to exchange her sweet and gentle thoughts was no longer by her side, when she grew pale as death with dire anxiety at the knowledge that this dear companion was far away, racked with pain and exposed to all the dangers of a serious illness, then she understood how this hourly and daily intimacy had attached her to Armand; she understood that she loved him with all her soul, and that should he die, she would not survive him.

He on the other hand only thought of her; he

talked of her when delirious with fever, he held out both arms to her ; he would have had her near him, and he suffered as much from her absence as from the illness that bore him down.

Marguérite had guessed Armand's inmost longings. Unable to see or to tend him, a deprivation that filled her heart with grief, she at least wished her image to be by his side, so she sent Madame d'Arcay a small portrait, taken two years previously when she was still a child. And the kind mother, who was aware of her son's greatest need amidst his sufferings, had placed the portrait by the patient's bedside, so that without fatigue he could constantly glance at those charming features, look into the eyes that seemed to smile at him.

Armand began to mend apace. But his recovery was scarcely complete when a sad complication arose. The condition of his unhappy father grew rapidly worse. His lunacy, which for many years had only shown itself in strange manias and odd behaviour, developed into a morbid state of coma, a melancholy lethargy which was proof against every kind of remedy. It looked as if death had already set in ; he neither spoke nor moved. The doctor was of opinion that the Southern climate might prolong this miserable existence for a little while, and advised Madame d'Arcay to settle either at Nice or Mentone.

It meant the interruption of Armand's studies at the very moment when he was about to reap the fruits of them. It meant above all a separation from Marguérite for an indefinite period. But the voice of duty called, and he obeyed the call and went away. The day before his departure Marguérite and he repaired at nightfall to the small chapel at "d'Albrays," and there, kneeling at one another's side before the altar with its flickering lights, they promised to love one another through life and death, to be one day united in wedlock.

Armand was away for three years. Monsieur d'Arcay died at Bordighiera. Armand had to bear with the additional grief of seeing his poor father's wandering looks turn away from him at the last moment. Ever since he had been ill, that is, during a period of twenty years, he had not had one lucid moment. He had never recognised either his wife or his son.

Madame d'Arcay and her son returned to Mesnil with the mortal remains of the former magistrate. For a twelvemonth they were absolutely overwhelmed with grief, and would not be reconciled to their loss. Armand had always hoped against hope. He refused to believe that his father's illness, which was of the gentle and harmless kind, would never be cured.

He endeavoured to allay his grief by studying hard, and was called to the bar. Marguérite also did her best to comfort him by her affectionate solicitude, by the encouraging example of her strong and valorous mind and heart.

Madame d'Arcay, whose whole life had been devoted to her husband, now devoted her life to her son. She had her house at Rennes built, and with a feeling of delicacy for which the young people were very grateful she consulted them about the smallest particular of the new dwelling as if wanting to convey that it was intended for them rather than for her.

At last she took the decisive step for which Armand had been waiting so impatiently, and which had been delayed by the sad events of the last few years. She went to ask the Count de Trémeillan for the hand of his daughter for her son Armand. The important mission was not undertaken without a certain feeling of emotion. She knew the settled ideas of the Count de Trémeillan. She knew that he carried his pride of birth to the furthestmost limits ; she knew of his haughty prejudices that made him

despise no matter what profession ; and she feared a refusal on the part of the old nobleman ; she foresaw for her dear Armand a disappointment that might perhaps wreck his life.

Hence it was with a voice rendered unsteady by emotion that kind Madame d'Arcay pronounced the traditional formula before that old man with the hard look that seemed always lost in a dream of other days.

To her intense surprise the stony face expressed no displeasure. Monsieur de Trémeillan suppressed a slight yawn, settled himself a little more upright in his chair, and said in an unconcerned tone of voice, " Yes, I knew that these children were fond of one another. Very well. The marriage will take place whenever you wish. My solicitor will inform you of the exact amount of my daughter's dowry."

CHAPTER XI.

COUNT DE TREMEILLAN rarely saw company. His fellow-men inspired him with a kind of mistrust and hatred, and he constantly shut himself up in his surly, misanthropical solitude. Nevertheless, at long intervals, he asked two or three neighbours to dinner, and among them the vicar of Bonnières, whom he held in great respect.

After dinner Armand went up to Monsieur de Rigny and took him aside. He was the actual proprietor of " Les Marnes," which he had bought at the terrible death of the Viscount de Mortrée. Armand wanted to draw him out on the subject of the former owner, but at the very mention of Marcellin de Mortrée's name, he looked terrified, and begged of him

never to pronounce that name in the hearing of his intended father-in-law.

"And why so?" asked Armand, who had been told now and then of the hatred between Monsieur de Trémeillan and young Viscount de Mortrée, but who had never troubled to ascertain the causes of that hatred.

"Come and have a cigar on the balcony," answered careful Monsieur de Rigny, gently pulling Armand on to a terrace overlooking the garden. "I'll tell you all about it in a few words."

When they were by themselves, the proprietor of "Les Marnes" told Armand that the Viscount de Mortrée had made the mistake of abandoning the ideas and principles of his family. His father had already set him a bad example. During the revolution he had bought some of the land of the nobles that had emigrated, in order to extend his own domain, and the gentry and aristocracy of the neighbourhood had never forgiven him. Viscount Marcellin had gone further still. He openly professed his unbelief, he neither believed in God nor the Devil. And, to make matters worse, he had, in 1830, accepted the functions of Mayor of the small village of Bourrée. Count de Trémeillan having met him one day at a neighbour's seat, had turned his back on him, and had even declared that if ever he came face to-face with him he would fling his glove in his face. He called him a traitor, an apostate, and bestowed even some more offensive epithets on him. He felt an incurable and deep antipathy to the young fellow.

At that point of Count de Rigny's story Marguérite de Trémeillan came to look for Armand, and gently reproached him with having deserted her.

It was a lovely night and the young couple went for a stroll in the park. The first beams of the rising moon filtered through the grand motionless trees and tinged the white mist of the evening dew floating

upward from the vast green sward of the garden. There was something weird and fantastic about these floating, indistinct vapours. Every now and then they seemed to be caught in the rank, lush grass, and to assume the strange ever-shifting shapes one beholds in a dream.

Armand and Marguérite walked very slowly, deeply impressed by that soul-stirring poetry that makes itself felt at the first hours of darkness when the moon sheds her peaceful light on all things.

They had scarcely got as far as the confines of the park when Marguérite asked Armand whether he remembered what anniversary it was to-day.

Armand looked up, somewhat surprised, reflected for a moment. Then he suddenly remembered. "Yes," he said, affectionately pressing his companion's arm as if to give her courage. "Yes, it is the anniversary of your poor mother's death."

"That's why I asked you to dine at 'd'Albrays.' I should not have liked to be by myself on that day. I love her so much, the poor mother whom I never knew." And a tear stood in her eye as she bent her head and sighed.

She had taken a dark, narrow avenue, cut bodily into a dense plantation of elms.

"Before I knew you," the girl went on, "I made a daily pilgrimage to this spot. Many a tear have I shed among these trees, many a sad sigh have I uttered. It was so sad not to have a mother to whom to confide my girl's thoughts. But then you came upon the scene, my darling; it is you who were made the confident of my thoughts and the poor tomb saw less of me."

By this time they had got to a small, circular clearing, hemmed in by tall, tapering pines, in the centre of which, flooded by the white moonlight, stood a very simple tomb; a kind of large marble sarcophagus on a low pedestal of black stone. The inscription stated that the body of Anne Louise

Thérèse Countess de Trémeillan had been laid to rest there on the 2nd September, 1850.

The young people stepped slowly up to the tomb, deeply affected, and keeping close to one another's side.

"We shall be married soon," whispered Marguélite, her voice quivering with emotion. "We must ask my mother for her blessing." They knelt on the edge of the black pedestal and rested their heads against the sarcophagus.

They remained in that position and amidst the deep silence for a long while, wholly given up to the mystic poesy of that solitary grave.

At last, after a long and heartfelt prayer, Marguélite raised her head, but at the same moment she uttered a cry and started terrified to her feet.

A dark figure stood on the other side of the tomb, and from beneath the hood that partly concealed the face a pair of eyes looked fixedly and angrily at her.

Armand, on hearing Marguélite's cry of distress had started to his feet also, and rushed to the strange apparition. But Marguélite, who had recovered her presence of mind, had recognised the indistinct form. With a shriek, she checked his further progress.

"Don't touch her, don't touch her," she cried out, "it's la Terreuse."

Marguélite and Armand turned in the direction of the house. Just before they left the clearing, Armand looked back and saw la Terreuse still standing motionless in the same spot.

He had often noticed the old woman gathering dead wood in the park, and he remembered Marguélite having pointed her out once, and having said, "This is the only enemy I have got in the country. Do what I will to her, she never has a kind word for me. But I believe the poor creature is off her head."

For a few moments they walked on in silence. Though neither of them was a coward, or given to strange fancies, the unexpected appearance of the old woman had somewhat upset them.

"What did la Terreuse want there at this hour?" asked Armand, as if replying to a question which at that moment was uppermost in his companion's mind.

"This is by no means the first time I have seen her near the tomb on the anniversary of my mother's death. I am afraid she did not like my mother either. I cannot account for it, because it seems that she has given proofs of extraordinary devotion to my father."

A few minutes afterwards they entered the house. The vicar had resumed his backgammon with Monsieur de Rigny. Count de Trémeillan, seated at a large open window, was staring dreamily and fixedly into the dark space beyond.

Marguérite sat down at the piano. Monsieur de Rigny having been beaten, Armand took his place opposite the old vicar of Bonnières, who gleefully took advantage of the mistakes of his young adversary, caused by the voice of Marguérite, which rose pure and sweet upon the silence of the huge drawing-room.

"Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, between two throws of the dice, "you have been at Bonnières a long while, have not you?"

"Over twenty-five years, dear Monsieur Armand," replied the old priest. "That counts up, does not it?"

"A very nice population to deal with, is not it?"

"Excellent."

"It must be a very pleasant mission to be the pastor of so docile a flock. The other day I saw the son of one of our tenants who has a living in one of the outskirts of Paris. He is very wretched,

apart from the fact that his parishioners use their knives on very slight provocation. It appears that this population of the stone quarries is a very bad one. He told me that he did not like to come home after dark."

"I have never been obliged to have that kind of fear," said the vicar, throwing his dice with an animation altogether free from care.

"I should say not," remarked Armand. "I am sure that since you have been at Bonnières there has not been a single offence among those worthy people, except perhaps a slight infraction of the game laws."

The vicar's face became very serious all at once, and assumed an expression which Armand had never noticed before.

"My dear Monsieur," answered the priest, "it were well to remember this: the most humble priest of the smallest and best behaved village in France is made the recipient of things that would make people's hair stand on end. There are hidden crimes in apparently the most peaceable and virtuous communities."

The vicar drew a deep sigh and quickly brushed his hand across his forehead as if to drive away some terrible recollection. Then he turned once more to the game.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW days went by, during which Armand never as much as mentioned to his friend André the subject which had been so cruelly worrying him for the last week.

But though the young barrister preserved com-

plete silence, André suspected what was uppermost in his mind. He had caught him several times pouring over that volume of *The Gazette des Tribunaux*, at others he had seen him turn over files of papers, grown yellow with age, which he had brought back one morning from Monsieur Loiseau's, his father's former clerk. It was, therefore, patent that Armand kept thinking of that unfortunate Torquenié business, that he was trying to form an opinion, and to get at the truth from beneath the mass of overlying matter.

One evening, at dinner, he told his mother and André that he was going away for a few days.

"I want to go to Paris," he said. "The wedding will be at the end of the month, and I want to make some purchases."

When he was alone with André he told him the real nature of his journey.

"I am going to Evreux," he said. "I am going to look for that poor Torquenié, and will question him once more. The more I think of this unhappy business the darker and more mysterious it appears to me. I cannot go on being worried about it as I am. For if the man really turned out to be innocent——" It was the first time that he expressed the doubt, and it was a sign of a great reaction having taken place in his mind.

Two days later Armand got to Evreux. But the most difficult thing was to find the man of whom he was in search. He went to make inquiries of the police, and was told that the discharged convict Torquenié had been employed in a button factory in the outskirts. He had been engaged to do odd jobs, but was obliged to leave at the end of two days.

The proprietor having found out who and what he was, had dismissed him. After that he still tried to get a miserable pittance by turning his hand to the most menial work; but his unsatisfactory antece-

dents had proved a bar everywhere. The commissary, lest he should starve to death, had authorised him to get a hurdy-gurdy and to beg for alms in the town. But the other beggars, and especially those who had their pitch at the cathedral door, had protested against a miserable jail bird taking the bit of bread they owed to public charity out of their mouths. They had "chevied" him from any and every vantage point. The lads of the town had not been slow to get scent of him, to point the finger at him, and to raise a huc and cry the moment he appeared.

"Really, Monsieur," said the commissary, "the police ought not to have to admit such a thing, seeing that it is its duty to watch the man, but I am bound to tell you that we do not know what has become of him for the last two days. It is by no means unlikely that he has jumped into the river, for, from what I have been told, he was reduced to the last straits. Candidly speaking, the loss would not be a great one," he added in the guise of conclusion, "for these folk are a great trouble to us."

Armand took his leave of the commissary, at a loss what to do, and very much upset. The idea that this poor wretch was, perhaps, dying of hunger and privation, a prey to the horrible temptation of taking his own life, caused him inexpressible anguish. From what he had just gathered, he perceived well enough that a protracted search would be useless, and that he, Armand, alone and a stranger to the town, would fail in hunting up the man, seeing that even the police were ignorant of his whereabouts. There was, therefore, nothing to be done but to return whence he had come, to take the train back to Rennes.

Still, he had by no means got over his emotion when, on the evening of the same day, he walked to the station, having relinquished all hopes of finding Jean Torquenié. Though the innocence of the man

seemed to him far from proved, he would have liked to question him, to read his very soul, and to form a personal opinion on that drama, which was fast assuming strange and mysterious proportions.

Armand d'Arcay was pondering all these things in his mind while walking along the long road that leads from the town to the railway station.

It was a dark night, and the man who carried his bag was walking a few steps in front of him.

They were keeping along the wall of the large park of a private estate, when all of a sudden a kind of shadow started from an angle, and at the same time a low voice fell upon his ear.

"Monsieur, for the love of God, give me something to buy a bit of bread."

The man who carried Armand's luggage had turned, at some distance there was a smoky street lamp that cast a feeble light on that part of the road. But feeble as was the light it enabled the porter to recognise the beggar.

"Ah, by heaven! Do not give him anything, Monsieur," he said quickly to Armand. "Do you know who the vagabond is? He came the other day to our place, and the governor would not let us give him as much as a crust. He has been in a convict prison, the skunk."

The man had stepped back, and prompted, no doubt, by a feeling of shame, slunk back to the hole which sheltered him. But Armand stepped up to him.

"Is it true that you have been in prison?" he asked him.

The beggar did not answer.

Neither of them spoke for a moment or so.

"Is not your name Jean Torquenié?" persisted Armand, speaking in a lower tone of voice.

"Do you know me?" asked the man in an undecipherable tone of fear and surprise.

"Yes, and I was looking out for you. Come along with me."

"Come along with you. Where to?"

"Back to the town. I want to speak to you."

"I am afraid, Monsieur, I have not got the strength to walk as far as that."

"Very well. There is an inn near here. Follow me to the inn." Armand went on in front, the man dragging himself along behind him, and leaning heavily on a kind of vine pole.

He seemed altogether knocked up.

The place which Armand had termed an inn was a kind of queer drinking-shop, frequented by the lower class of railway employés and agricultural labourers of the neighbourhood who had to wait for the train. The tap-room had a low ceiling, and was smoke-begrimed. Two or three customers were sleeping off their potations of cider-brandy in attitudes resembling those of wild brutes at rest. An old woman was knitting a stocking behind the shaky trestles that did duty as a counter.

Armand paid the man who carried his luggage, pretending not to notice his gestures of surprise and the looks of stupefaction which he cast at him and at his strange companion.

Then he went up to the old woman and asked her for a room where they could be by themselves. The woman got up with a growl at being disturbed, lighted a candle and showed them into a black hole where there was a table and two wooden benches supported on stakes that had been driven into the mud floor. She placed a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses on the table and went away.

Armand beckoned Jean Torquenié to sit down opposite him. "Do not you recognise me?" he asked of the convict, while he remained standing.

The man raised his head and Armand could not help shuddering as he looked at the wretched face. It was still more sunken, more attenuated than when he had looked at it at Rennes a fortnight previously. There were deep red rings round the feverish, bright eyes; the

skin was covered with a yellowish, mouldy film, the underlip drooped.

Torquenié stared fixedly at the young barrister, but he did not seem to see him at all. He was pressing his stomach with one of his clenched hands, and muttered, "I am hungry."

Armand opened the door and told the woman to bring some bread.

The poor fellow flung himself upon it like a wild animal, eating ravenously without looking up, cramming it into his mouth with both hands, in order to go quicker. Armand poured him out a glass of wine, which he gulped down with the same eagerness.

After a few minutes, when his hunger had evidently somewhat subsided, Armand repeated his question—

"Do you recognise me?"

Torquenié shook his head to say that he did not.

"You came to see me at Rennes a fortnight ago," Armand said. "You asked me to help you, pretending that the law had made an error in your case."

Torquenié left him no time to finish, he made a sudden movement as if to withdraw.

"Ah, you are the judge's son," he said, giving him a terrible look.

"Look you here," said Armand, drawing closer to him. "I wish to forget all that has occurred between us, the insults you flung at a dear and sacred memory. You have suffered much, you are suffering still, and we ought to be lenient towards those who suffer. If you are guilty you have cruelly expiated your double crime."

"I am innocent," said Jean Torquenié with the harrowing accents and sullen energy that always marked the assertion.

"You must prove it."

"I will prove it," said the man, bringing his fist down on the table. "Since I have been here, exposed to every insult, to every privation, struggling to keep

body and soul together, I have been tempted more than once to make an end of this horrible existence. But I have always been borne up by the idea of proving my innocence, of being able to hold up my head ; in short, to be a man again."

He dropped his head in his clenched hands and sat utterly crushed for a moment. "I wanted to work in order to earn money and to pay a barrister. I have been insulted, hounded away everywhere. This is the first bit of bread I have eaten these three days. Yes, for three days I have been prowling in the outskirts of the town like a wild beast, not daring to go near other men. What am I to do, great God, to prove that the law has made a mistake. The other day, on leaving your house, humiliated, in despair, I applied to another barrister. When I told him the motive of my call, he mentioned money. All I had in the world was fivepence. Ah, if Monsieur Rousseau were still alive. He knew me, he did, he knew that I had been the victim of a terrible mistake, and he would have taken up my case ; he was a grand and noble nature."

"Your former counsel is dead ?"

"I believe so. Shortly after my arrival at the convict station, I wrote to him, and he answered my letter. We corresponded for about three years. He always told me to hope, that he had an idea of having found the right clue, that he would not give me up, and that he would do all he could to get me out of prison. Then I did not hear from him for many months. My letters remained unanswered. I made sure that he was dead to have forgotten me as he did. I wrote several years afterwards to a man in Rennes whom I knew, begging him to make some inquiries about Monsieur Rousseau. He answered me that people in town did not know what had become of him. After that I gave up all hope. I understood that I was alone in the world, and I felt more unhappy than ever.

Jean Torquenié drew a long, deep sigh, and relapsed into his state of despondency. Armand d'Arcay looked at him quickly. He seemed to muster up all his courage, and to take a resolution evidently very painful to him.

"If you are really innocent," he said, slowly, and in a low voice, putting his head close to that of Torquenié, "I will be to you all that the man of whom you speak would have been. I pledge you my oath that I shall leave no stone unturned to get you the justice you ask for. My personal endeavours, such talent as I possess, all the influence I can dispose of will be used to free your name from infamy, to get you out of the wretched condition in which you are. But, from the day I undertake to do this, I shall be your judge, I shall reopen the inquiry from the very beginning, I shall question such to the witnesses as are still alive, I will find the key to this obscure mystery, and I shall take no steps to have your innocence publicly acknowledged until I myself am thoroughly convinced of that innocence."

As Armand proceeded, a bright look had come into the pale and emaciated face of the former convict.

"But if you are going to do this, I am saved," he said at last, almost joyously. "Ah, Monsieur," he went on, "think of all I have suffered, think of the harsh behaviour of the judge who interrogated me, and forgive me if I forgot myself and cursed him. You are good and generous; I feel, I see it, you have given me bread when I was dying with hunger, you have restored a gleam of hope to me. Yes, I want to live now, I want to live. What do you wish me to do, Monsieur? Speak, question me, I remember every detail as if it were yesterday. Remember that for twenty long years I have thought of nothing else but this, and the slightest particulars are perfectly vivid to my mind."

"At present you are too weak to prolong this

interview, and I myself, before questioning you, want to think, and to review the whole affair over again. I shall take steps to make you come to Rennes. In that way you will be at hand when I want you, and it will make my inquiry less difficult. Meanwhile take this money," he said, taking his purse from his pocket. "You will take up your quarters in this or any other place, and you shall send me your address. My name is Armand d'Arcay, I live at Rennes, where everyone knows me. The moment I have got the necessary permission I will let you know, and you shall come to Brittany. Nay, do not thank me," added the young barrister, getting up. "If you are innocent, I shall only have done my duty; if you are guilty, and if you have lied to me, I shall have signally avenged the memory of my poor father by returning you good for evil."

With this Armand put his purse on the table and left the inn, leaving poor Jean Torquenié absolutely dazed by what had happened.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALMOST immediately after his return to Rennes Armand went to see one of the judges, an old friend of his father, and asked him about the necessary formalities to transfer a discharged convict from the town that had been assigned to him to Rennes. He told him that he took an interest in the man.

"According to you, then, there are not enough scamps in our town?" replied the magistrate curtly.

"I am certain that the man will behave all right," said Armand.

"Are you very anxious about the thing?"

"Very, my dear Monsieur Dubourg."

The judge went to his writing-table to put down the particulars. "What is his name?" he asked.

"Jean Torquenié."

The judge was trying to recollect. "It is one of the last cases my friend d'Arcay investigated, and it was handled in a masterly manner. But is not it rather odd that the son should take an interest in the man whom the father was instrumental in convicting?"

"Torquenié was Count de Trémeillan's gamekeeper, and you are no doubt aware of my forthcoming marriage with Mademoiselle de Trémeillan."

The judge seemed to consider the explanation a valid one. "After all," he said, the man cannot be very dangerous. He was goaded into crime through love; it is a species of ridiculous and at the same time gentle criminal. It would be a good thing if the Government did not send us anything more dangerous than that. But I am sorry to say, friend, that the Emperor is like you, too good." Armand did not ask Monsieur Dubourg to what he was alluding, nor why the Emperor's name was introduced in connection with a discharged convict. He said a few words of thanks to the judge and rose to go. But when he got as far as the door, he stood still, seemed to consider for a moment.

"Oh, by the by, Monsieur Dubourg," he said, coming back to the writing-table, "you who knew all the particulars of the Torquenié affair, can you tell me what became of the counsel for the defence?"

"Do you mean Rousseau?" asked the magistrate, sharply raising his head. "I really trust you are not going to interest yourself in him also," he added, turning crimson, his eyes lighting up with a sudden fire.

"I was told he was dead."

"He dead? Do that kind of people ever die?" exclaimed Monsieur Dubourg in an irritable tone.

"No, worse luck, he is not dead. And I can even tell you for the gratification of kind-hearted people who, like yourself, take an interest in criminals, that his precious person has been restored to us."

Armand looked so utterly at a loss to understand Judge Dubourg's meaning that the latter thought it necessary to explain.

"Rousseau was a dangerous fellow. We packed him off to Africa in 1852. But the Emperor has thought fit to remit his sentence, and he has been back in Rennes for the last fortnight. If you care to leave your card, he lives in the same house with Loiseau, the former clerk to your father, in the Rue des Canettes.

A few minutes afterwards Armand groped his way along a dark and narrow passage. Through a door that stood ajar in the passage he could hear a chirping and twittering loud enough to deafen people.

An old woman pounced upon him from a black hole that did duty as a kitchen.

"What is it you want?" she asked, sniffing round Armand like a cross-grained mongrel.

"I believe Monsieur Rousseau lives here?"

"Yes, on the third floor, to the left."

Armand climbed up the rickety, steep, and worn staircase, and got to the third floor. A window in the roof shed a faint light on that part of the staircase, the first flights of which were wrapt in utter darkness. To the left he noticed a low door, taking up almost the whole of the panel.

Armand knocked at it, but no one answered. He knocked again, and louder this time. Then it was opened slowly and cautiously by an old man, evidently afraid of the cold, and wrapt up to the chin in an old and threadbare dressing-gown, which showed the outlines of his terribly thin and emaciated frame. One hand was still on the latch, while the other held a pair of tongs.

"Monsieur Rousseau?" said Armand.

"I—I am Monsieur Rousseau," said the old man, in a low and halting voice. But seeing that he remained perfectly still behind the partly-open door, merely casting a suspicious look at the stranger who had thus come upon him, Armand said—

"I have come to ask you, Monsieur Rousseau, to see and give me a few minutes' conversation. You may be able, perhaps, to perform an act of kindness."

The door opened a little wider, and the old man stood aside to let Armand pass. At the end of a narrow passage the young barrister found himself in a small, poorly furnished room, the brick floor of which had all its colour worn off, and was littered with dusty books and newspapers. A rickety arm-chair, with one of its castors gone, stood near the grate, in which there burned a rather bright fire.

Monsieur Rousseau dropped into the arm-chair, stirred the fire, and warmed his hands at the flame. Armand had taken a chair, and seated himself in front of him. He felt as if in a dream. He could scarcely believe that this diminutive old man, looking so ill and crestfallen, was the proud and impassioned man of old, whose great talent, whose fiery eloquence he had often heard mentioned during his childhood. Two wisps of greyish hair tumbled anyhow over the prominent, deeply-lined forehead. The eyes looked utterly dull, the mouth had lost all expression, he was constantly shivering from head to foot.

"Monsieur," said Armand, when his first feeling of surprise had sufficiently subsided to restore his self-control and to break the ice—"Monsieur, I am afraid you will think my request somewhat indiscreet and out of the usual way?"

Seeing that the old man neither stirred nor looked up, but sat perfectly still, his head bent towards the fire, and utterly lost in his own thoughts, Armand felt compelled to go on.

"Years ago you practised in this town, and in the course of your professional duties you took up the defence of a poor devil whom your talent failed to save from prison? I am alluding to Jean Torquenié."

At the mention of that name the old man shivered and passed his trembling hand across his forehead.

"In fact, I recollect," he said. "Why do you ask me all this, Monsieur?"

Armand d'Arcay felt painfully affected. The poor man facing him seemed as far gone intellectually as physically. His words came slowly, obstructed by a horrible stammer.

"The man has just been discharged from prison; he pretends that he is innocent."

"That is true, the law in this instance did an infamous thing," said the erstwhile barrister, whose looks seemed to grow animated as of yore.

Shocked as he felt by this vigorous affirmation, Armand did not betray his feelings.

"He pretends that he was the victim of a judicial error and wants to take steps for a revision of his sentence."

"He is right, very right indeed," said the old man, his sudden animation making his articulation more painful still. He made a powerful effort to speak distinctly, but the lips that had been so eloquent in bygone days only twitched and trembled convulsively.

"Yes, he is right. That man's innocence should be proved before he dies. His honest name should be restored to him. Ah! if I were only able . . . if they had not taken the life out of me."

He waved his arms in despair and uttered a hoarse yell, then he dropped heavily back into the arm-chair, from which he had tried to rise.

"The man has entrusted me with his defence, and I have accepted," Armand went on; "but on

condition that he first of all should clearly prove his innocence to me."

"You are right. One should only take up just causes," assented the old man, drawing up his frame bent by age and sickness.

"I thought, Monsieur, that you might be able to give me some useful hints on the affair."

"I can give you more than hints," said Monsieur Rousseau; then he looked the young fellow straight in the face. "I can give you proofs."

"Monsieur," Armand went on; "I am bound to tell you the whole truth. You should know who I am. My name is Armand d'Arcay; I am the son of the judge who conducted the preliminary interrogatory."

Monsieur Rousseau did not seem in the least surprised.

"This is a good and noble thought of yours, Monsieur," he said. "You are doing your duty. Your father cruelly harassed the man, and his disgrace is mainly owing to your father; he was the cause of his having been condemned to twenty years' penal servitude. I must own that I failed to understand at first his bitter stubbornness against that unfortunate Torquenié. To me his conduct seemed nothing short of infamous. But I found out differently afterwards. Within two years of the affair your father went mad, and I have learned since that he was no longer in the possession of his mental faculties when he was entrusted with the affair. . . . Torquenié has been the victim of a madman and of a great criminal."

The effort to say as much consecutively seemed to have thoroughly exhausted him. Armand also kept silent for a few minutes; he was utterly crushed by what he had just heard.

The barrister had positively affirmed what up till now had been to him but a painful possibility which his mind refused to accept. He had formally declared

that Monsieur d'Arcay had conducted the preliminaries of the case with the fixed idea of a monomaniac, with the irresponsibility of a madman.

After a few moments of silence, Armand went on, "If, in fact, the proofs of which you speak are conclusive, I promise you, Monsieur, to defend Jean Torquenié with all the ardour, if not with all the talent, you yourself would have shown in this cause."

"Will you come and see me the day after tomorrow, Monsieur? I am trying to put some of these documents straight," he concluded, pointing to the dusty papers that were littering the floor. "They want looking over after so long an absence of mine."

Armand rose and took his leave of the old barrister, after having promised him to come back the day after next at two o'clock.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARMAND'S marriage was fixed to take place shortly, but his own happiness did not make him lose sight of the unfortunate man whom he had promised to befriend. He had told André of the particulars of his journey to Evreux, and of the interview with the proscribed old barrister. The painter had heartily congratulated his friend on the generous determination at which he had arrived, and having had to return to Paris because of his work, had promised him to come back for his wedding.

"I also trust to hear very shortly of your maiden speech in the Torquenié affair," he added. "What a lucky thing to be able to start with such a case as

that. Why it will make a sensation. People will be talking of it from one end of France to the other."

Armand spent the following day with Marguélite de Trémellan. He went to "d'Albrays," and during the whole of that lovely, fragrant summer day they strolled about in the park, talking of the past, and dreaming of the future.

When the young girl felt tired they sat down on some stone seat, which the water, dropping from the trees, had covered with a greenish fur, and they chatted, oblivious of the passing hour.

"How happy I will be near you," said Marguélite, nestling her head on Armand's shoulder. "What a change in my life."

"Dear darling, you have not been happy up till now then?"

"Yes, whenever you were near me," replied the young girl, fixing her handsome, candid, and sweet eyes on him. "The rest of the time I tried not to think by riding and roaming the park, gun in hand, like a boy. But when I had to go back to the house——"

She did not finish the sentence, and a slight shiver ran through the marble white shoulders, perceptible beneath the pink muslin bodice.

"Yes, I understand," said Armand, divining the nature of the thoughts that had beclouded the young girl's face.

"Oh, if I had not met with you," she went on, clasping her hands, "if I had not had your affection to bear me up with the idea that one day my life would be different; if my heart had not been full of you——"

Again she paused for awhile.

"Can you imagine," she went on at last, "what a heart like mine, hungering for kindness, for affection, eager to cling joyously to someone, must suffer in the constant presence of that stern and sad face?"

And she glanced rather than pointed in the direction of the house where her father, Count de Trémeillan, as usual, sat near the open window, motionless like a statue.

"Never an affectionate word, never as much as a caress, a kind of chilling politeness, as he might have shown to a stranger. One might as well be dead. He does not care for me, and, as for myself, I have never felt for him the loving affection one should feel for one's parents, the affection I should have felt for my mother had she been alive."

"Don't think of this any more, dear, darling Marguérite," said Armand, taking both her hands in his. "Remember that your father has been really kind when he gave you to me, of whom he scarcely knew anything. He is naturally stern and severe, like all those who labour under a fixed idea. Political passion has one by one broken all the fibres of his heart, and withered all feeling of affection. Nevertheless, you have seen that he can enact the loving father when your happiness was at stake. I may confess that I scarcely expected so favourable an answer when I was bold enough to ask for your hand. I knew his prejudices with regard to noble birth, and I do not pretend to trace my pedigree back to the Crusaders. My fortune is far from being equal to yours. We must, therefore, conclude that he was influenced by our love for one another, and that he did not hesitate to forego some of his pet ideas to insure your happiness."

"You are right, Armand dear. Let us talk of something else," said Marguérite, who had scarcely paid attention to his last sentence.

And the Count de Trémeillan was dismissed from their minds, in which love reigned supreme once more.

Armand had promised his mother to be back at Rennes for dinner. The day was waning, and it was time to go; so he took Marguérite back to the

house, promising to come and see her next morning early, as he had a business appointment later on.

Marguérite smiled. "I trust people will not say that I am marrying a briefless barrister. I shall be very delighted to hear your speeches. Good-bye, then, dearest, till to-morrow." And she held up her head, on which Armand pressed a long, long kiss ; then he got into his little trap, and soon disappeared at a bend in the principal drive.

Marguérite, standing at the bottom of the shallow flight of steps, watched him until the trees of the park hid him from her sight, then with a sad sigh she went up the stone steps that led to the hall and dining-room.

When Armand got to the end of the park, and near the gamekeeper's lodge, he checked the pace of his horse. He carefully examined the small, ivy-mantled tenement, its garden, its quickset hedge, as if to wrest from those mute witnesses the secret which for the last few days had so seriously occupied his mind.

A few steps further on he came upon an old woman gathering wood by the roadside. She wore the long black hooded cloak which is the mourning garment of the women of Brittany,

Having looked up for a moment as Armand drove by, Armand recognised la Terreuse, that strange and half-witted creature which he had met several times in the neighbourhood of the house, and who had so thoroughly frightened Marguérite de Trémeillan on the evening she had found her standing by her mother's tomb.

The part this woman had enacted, twenty years previously, in the Torquenié trial, and her important evidence before the Court, gave Armand the idea that it would be necessary perhaps to appeal to her recollections in the inquiry he meant to set afoot. So he stopped his horse and alighted, pretending that there was something wrong with one of the traces.

He was but a few steps away from la Terreuse, but the latter seemed to take no notice of him.

"Gathering store for the winter already, mother?" said Armand, pretending to be busy with the harness.

The woman turned her back and did not answer. Armand declined to be put off in that way.

"It is very hard to have to do that kind of thing at your age," he remarked. "Have you no one to help you. Surely you are not alone in the world?"

"What is that to you?" mumbled la Terreuse, growling like a cross-grained dog.

"I have often noticed you near the house. You know that I am going to marry Mademoiselle Trémeillan very shortly. Let me give you my wedding present." With this he took a couple of gold pieces from his pocket. But la Terreuse drew back quickly.

"I do not ask for charity," she said in a hard voice. "You may keep your money." Then she seemed all of a sudden to become modified, and slowly drew nearer to Armand.

"Oh, so you are the barrister," she said, looking at him from top to toe. "The master has told me of you. You like him, don't you?"

"Whom?"

"The master."

"I am very fond of his daughter," said Armand smiling.

"You must also be fond of the Count. . . . You should take care that people do not do him any harm."

"And who would want to do him any harm?" asked Armand, rather surprised at this.

"No one, no one," muttered the old woman, evidently put out. "I am a bit weak in the head, I am so old." With this she was about to turn away.

"Do you live near here?" asked Armand, who was anxious for her to stay.

"Over there," was the answer as she held up her stick in the direction of the former gamekeeper's lodge. Then she tried to get away once more, dragging the wood she had made into a faggot behind her.

"You are a plucky woman," said Armand; "you are not afraid of ghosts then?"

La Terreuse left go hold of her faggot and veered round suddenly.

"Why . . . what ghosts . . . What do you mean?" she asked in one breath, fixing her dark and piercing eyes, that flashed from beneath her black hood on the young barrister.

"Years ago a woman was poisoned in there."

"The dead are dead right enough. Why should she come back? Why?"

She seemed terribly excited, and her tanned and deeply-lined face twitched nervously.

Armand was not slow to notice the uncommon agitation. He was aware of the superstitions of country people and of the legends that find such easy credence among the Breton peasantry.

"I have been told," he said, dropping his voice with an air of mystery, "that on moonlight nights she is often seen prowling round the house."

"Who, what? Of whom are you talking? I have never seen aught of the kind. . . . Nothing, nothing at all, do you hear."

"Others may have seen her. I am talking of Marianne, the wife of Jean Torquenié. You know her, you nursed her in her last illness."

"Well, and did she not say that I nursed her well?" asked the old woman, who had recovered all her energy, and who now looked Armand straight in the face, her eyes unflinchingly fixed on his.

"She says that it was not her husband who poisoned her."

"I have never heard a word of all this. If any one had met her, I should have been told of it right

enough," said la Terreuse, looking at Armand with a defiant air. "Why do you come and talk to me of all these old stories? I have forgotten all about them."

She turned away and went slowly in the direction of the lodge. A young peasant lad with a shockhead of hair who lived with her, came to take her faggot and helped her in getting up the shallow flight of steps.

Armand got into his trap and never drew rein until he got to Rennes.

CHAPTER XV

NEXT day Armand punctually called at the time appointed by Monsieur Rousseau. The old lawyer was seated by the fire, and notwithstanding the radiant summer sun outside was warming his hands at the flame.

Armand felt deeply moved at the sight of the man who had suffered so much, and whose whole appearance showed traces of his cruel tortures.

Although he had heard a great deal of harm said during his childhood with regard to the barrister's mode of life, although the somewhat narrow-minded manner in which he, Armand, had been brought up, made him dissent from the principles Monsieur Rousseau professed, he did not share Justice Dubourg's admiration for the institutions of the Second Empire, nor the latter's hatred of those who had been vanquished in their resistance to the Coup d'Etat of December, 1851.

He looked upon Monsieur Rousseau as an unfortunate, misguided man, who had cruelly expiated his errors by long years of suffering in the desert of

Lambessa, who had sacrificed his future, his talents, and health to his opinions. Face to face with such misfortune, Armand's noble and generous nature only felt a deep and sincere pity.

As soon as Armand had bade him good morning, and taken his seat, Monsieur Rousseau took from a small writing-table, close at hand, a file of papers yellowed with age, and spread them on his lap.

"These," he said, in his painfully halting voice, "are a few notes on the Torquenié affair which I collected some years ago. They may be useful to you."

He laid his attenuated and shaking hand on the file. "But before we go any further I should like to know whether the principal actors in this drama are still alive."

"As I told you," replied Armand, "I have seen Torquenié, but I am not at all certain as to what has become of the other witnesses at the trial, with the exception of la Terreuse, who is still alive."

"Oh, indeed," remarked Rousseau. "She is an important witness. And the Count de Trémeillan, is he alive also?"

"Yes," said Armand. "And what is more, I am going to marry Mademoiselle de Trémeillan shortly."

Rousseau stared at the young barrister with a look of indescribable surprise and interest.

"Oh," he said, "you are going to marry Mademoiselle de Trémeillan?" Then he dropped his eyes, and sat silent for a little while. At last he untied the string of the bundle of papers he had in his lap, and with a listless air ran through the various documents it contained, as if wishing to collect his mind before proceeding.

"If your marriage is so near," he said after a while, "you will scarcely have time to see about the business of this poor devil; and you would do better, perhaps, to confide these documents to one of your colleagues."

"You told me yourself the other day, Monsieur, that it is my duty to defend the man, if he is innocent, and to get a revision of his sentence. I am very fond of my intended wife, and my marriage with her will realise the dream of my life. But I trust to be able to reconcile my love with my duty."

"Do you think you will?"

There was such a tone of doubt in these five words on Rousseau's part that Armand felt somewhat hurt.

"Why do you seem to doubt me, Monsieur? Do not you think that we also may be fully impressed with the stern dictates of duty?"

"I did not say that," replied Rousseau, gently. "I believe you to be animated by the best intentions. Yours is a kind heart, I am almost certain of it. But there are unforeseen circumstances . . . terrible circumstances which may play havoc with the best of resolutions."

"What do you mean, Monsieur? I am afraid I do not understand you."

The old barrister remained silent for another little while. He stirred his fire in a nervous manner that showed his mental preoccupation, then he rose from his chair, and painfully shuffled up and down the room. All at once he stopped right in front of Armand.

"Then you are determined to take up this Torquenié case; to find out the real assassins of Marcellin de Mortrée and Marianne, to bring them to justice; in short, to prove the innocence of . . . this poor fellow?" he asked.

"I have firmly made up my mind," replied Armand. "But why all these questions, Monsieur? Do you take me to be a child, and is the formal promise I have already given to that effect not sufficient? You yourself told me this the other day. If my father really wrested a false confession from this man by intimidating him, we can only blame the terrible malady that was already undermining him at the

time when he was entrusted with the task. He acted without discernment. He was not guilty !”

“And suppose he were guilty ?” asked Monsieur Rousseau, folding his arms across his breast, and staring Armand full in the face.

The young man shuddered and grew horribly pale. Still, he replied in a firm tone—

“If such were the case, I should consider it more urgent still to do my duty. I would defend this man.”

“Right, Monsieur, right indeed,” said Rousseau, warmly. “Yours is a noble nature, and a plucky one besides. I will tell you all I know about this affair. Some very cruel surprises may be in store for you. But I wish to tell you at once that my opinion with regard to your father is the one I told you yesterday. He has been the unconscious instrument of the real perpetrators of this crime. He assisted them without being their accomplice in the least. He was not to blame for what he did.”

CHAPTER XVI.

ARMAND was intensely astonished at what he had just heard, very anxious to know what Monsieur Rousseau was driving at and the reason of this cautious preamble before coming to the point. He felt that a kind of vague uneasiness was torturing him. He had the foreboding of some great calamity. Still, he was far from suspecting the extent of the blow that was to crush him.

After having sat still for a little while, as if to gather his necessary strength, Monsieur Rousseau began. His story was a long one, and it was made longer still by the painful impediment in his

speech. We give it as briefly as possible. "Monsieur," said the old barrister, "I may take it for granted that you have carefully gone through the account of the trial with which we are concerned. *The Gazette des Tribunaux* published a sufficiently exact report of it, at any rate, as regards the facts. I will pass by the more or less just appreciations the writer thought fit to give of the incidents of the trial."

Armand said that he had read through the whole of the trial several times, and that he perfectly remembered, and in their most minute particulars, the examination of the prisoner and of the witnesses.

"That is all right then. Let us start at the beginning then, namely, the indictment. There already we find the sign of partiality and deliberate onesidedness that cannot fail to strike one as we proceed. Upon what, in fact, is the accusation founded? Upon a vague rumour, upon a slanderous bit of gossip of a lot of peasant women, and propagated by a parcel of scamps who have a grudge against Torquenié for having molested them in the exercise of his duty. The whole of the indictment is built upon that rumour. What is the upshot? The straining to invest the fable adopted with a semblance of truth. In order to do this, both facts and characters alike are twisted and misrepresented. The Viscount de Mortrée, who is the incarnation of loyalty and honour, is held up as a vulgar profligate, a perverted Don Juan who rewards the care and hospitality of a capital fellow by seducing his wife. Marianne, that poor Marianne, so affectionate and so passionately attached to her husband, becomes, by the same means, an arrant coquette, who is dazzled by the love of a gentleman. Torquenié was as open as the day, though somewhat rough spoken. They change him into a violent, jealous, vindictive brute, capable of any and every crime.

"Political passion is dragged into the affair.

Viscount de Mortrée has incurred the hatred of the country gentry all round, and of the religious folk of Rennes by his independent ideas, by the admiration he professes for the men and things of the Revolution. The magistrates share these prejudices, this aversion for the bold champion of the new ideas, and they eagerly embrace the opportunity of showing in the most odious and ridiculous light.

"Far from me be it to condone altogether Viscount de Mortrée's conduct. He was no doubt guilty. But his error was a pardonable one, and if there was a woman in the case, he did not basely sully the honour of the man who had received him beneath his roof and saved him.

"But let us leave those general considerations aside, and come to facts. I did not find out in a single day all that I am going to tell you now. It took me a long time, and I was obliged to be very cautious, so as not to alarm the real criminals. Moreover, my professional duties and the political struggles with which I was mixed up, left me no time unfortunately to pursue the affair actively. If such had not been the case I should have had the satisfaction of getting Torquenié out of prison, and to consign thither in his stead those who deserved it. before the sad event that sent me into exile. -

"I always entertained certain vague suspicions which I found it very difficult to clear up. There was no doubt about Viscount de Mortrée having been frequently seen in the neighbourhood of 'd'Albrays,' there was equally no doubt that now and then he made his way into the park at night-all."

"But was it to meet Marianne Torquenié or someone else? One day a lucky chance, an accident if you like, put me on a sure track and showed me that my suspicions were well founded."

"You are aware that every now and then the Commissioners of 'Crown property' sell by auction

in the different law courts of France the various articles, in other words, the material proofs, that have figured in criminal trials."

"One morning on going into the courts, I happened to see the poster, setting forth the conditions of one of those sales, and I bethought myself that I might find among the flotsam and jetsam of the Torquenié trial things the importance of which had escaped the notice of the judges. So said, so done; I bought the whole of the articles connected with the Torquenié trial, and when I got home, examined them very carefully.

"And now I want you to appeal to your memory. Do you remember the indictment alluding quite incidentally, casually as it were, to a small blue book that was found in Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée's trousers' pocket on the morning he was murdered? It was an odd volume of Balzac, a fragment of his great masterpiece known under the generic title, 'La Comédie Humaine.' It was 'Le Lys dans la Vallée.' The idea struck me that the little book might contain a note, a mark that might be of use to me. I need not tell you that the mind, when over-excited by the solution of a difficult problem, becomes very acute indeed.

"I carefully turned over the leaves of the little book. I found nothing, absolutely nothing. It was a little book, just like any other little book, very much thumbed and worn, but the margin was intact and there was no note concealed within its pages.

"I fell a-reading the admirable story and gradually yielded to the poet's charm of style. Seated by the fire I must have read a long while, forgetting for the time the thing uppermost in my mind.

"Still, I fancy I must have been thinking of my inquiry for all that, and the touching story of Madame Mortsauf could not have utterly engrossed my mind, for all of a sudden I jumped out of my

chair, as it were, as if the truth, of which I was in search, had suddenly flashed upon me.

“The explanation of my sudden emotion, which had the effect of an unexpected thunderclap on me, is this.

“On the page I was reading I had noticed a few black points, almost imperceptible to the naked eye, and looking like fly-blows between the blanks of the lines. These points were placed beneath a certain number of letters. I bethought myself of putting together some of these letters and found that they made up into words.

“And now can you imagine my feelings? That book which was found in the pocket of Viscount de Mortrée was evidently the means of a secret correspondence, probably a love correspondence. But who was the young nobleman’s correspondent? I collected on a sheet of paper, and in taking them in the order as they stood, all the letters marked with a tiny black point. After this very easy task, I got the page which I am going to read to you now. You will find, that to judge from the style and the thoughts themselves, that letter is not exactly the letter of a woman of humble condition.”

Rousseau took a sheet of paper from the bundle of documents before him and read as follows:—

“I can think of nothing or of no one but you, dear friend. Your image is so indelibly stamped both on mind and heart that I cannot escape from it. Scarcely a moment passes but what I fancy I hear the sound of your voice; the words of love you whispered to me when kneeling at my feet and in such passionate tones during that beautiful evening we spent beneath those magnificent trees in the park constantly ring in my ears. You appreciate me well enough to know that I am not a woman likely to engage in a vulgar intrigue. Therefore, I want you to read carefully what I am about to say to you. I only ask you to judge me leniently. What you

are about to read will drive you frantic with joy, and you will not be too severe on her who loves you with such ineffable tenderness.

“Marcellin, I cannot lay claim to the virtue of Madame de Mortsauf. But the difference is that I have no children. And if the victim of Clochegourde had not been a mother, you know as well as I, that no more than I, she would have been proof against his love. Therefore, may God forgive me for what I am about to do. But in my inmost soul and conscience I do not consider myself guilty. I was married too young to a man whom I never loved. One word of affection would have saved me and would have saved his honour. That word, I still begged for it as late as last night as the condemned man begs for mercy—and he denied it to me. He was harsh and stern, and pitiless, as always. In trying to sound his heart, I only heard the sound of a stone. I can no longer live like this. My heart longs to love someone. I know I am good looking, I feel capable of making the life of the man I love and who loves me happy and sweet. In the position I am there are but two ways open to me: to kill myself, or to give myself to you.

“During a weary night, spent in anguish, I have had these two prospects before me, these two prospects which, as it were, make up the horizon of my life. Death itself has no terrors for me. But if I die I shall no longer see you.

“No, the die is cast. Come this evening and my faithful Marianne will tell you the way to get into the house. We will make our plans to get away. For get away we must. I am not one of those double-faced women who can hide the lover behind them while they assume before the world and their husband the most virtuous airs. I want you to be all my own, as I shall be yours. Come to me, my dearly beloved, take me into your arms, that I may know the joys and intoxication of love, such as your

passionate accents pictured them to me last night. Come. I love you."

When he had finished reading *Monsieur Rousseau* sat silent for a few minutes, partly to give his tired-out voice a brief respite, partly to judge the effect of the letter on *Armand*.

The latter was simply stupefied.

"*Monsieur de Mortrée* the lover of the Countess de Trémeillan?" he said at last, as if awaking from a dream.

Monsieur Rousseau nodded his head in token of assent. After a short pause he went on—

"You are fully able to see by now what did occur, are not you? *Viscount Mortrée* went to the appointment offered him by the Countess de Trémeillan. The husband, who probably had his suspicions, came upon them unawares. *Monsieur de Mortrée* escaped half-dressed. He was pursued and killed by *Count de Trémeillan*, or by one of his trusty servants. But the honour of the real criminal had to be shielded. Thereupon, and with deep-laid cunning, the story of a love intrigue between *Marcellin de Mortrée* and the gamekeeper's wife was trumped up. As you may see by this letter, *Marianne* must often have guarded the lovers against surprise. The *Viscount de Mortrée* had been noticed several times in the lodge. That was more than sufficient for a foundation of the base charge against this unfortunate *Torquenié*.

"And now I want you to pay attention to the events subsequent to the assassination of *Viscount de Mortrée*. *Marianne* falls ill, stricken down with a violent attack of fever. It is certain that during that night she witnessed some terrible scene, and the affair took such hold on her mind that fever was the result.

"She is there while her lodge is overhauled by the authorities, but so ill as to be unconscious of what is going on. In her delirium she beholds the

magistrates enter the place, interrogate her husband. But she has not the slightest notion of what it means, does not understand a word of what is said.

"Still, there is the chance of her recovery. The moment may come when she will be able to say what she has seen during that terrible night of the 25th April. She may lift her voice in defence of her husband who is unjustly accused; she may point out the real assassin of Viscount de Mortrée. She must be got rid of at all costs, and what is more, there is no time to lose. Before she recovers her reason, Marianne Torquenié dies by poison.

"And now can you guess who had an interest in her death and who ordered that abominable crime?

"Two days after the murder of Marcellin de Mortrée; several days before the death of Marianne Torquenié, the Countess de Trémeillan starts for Nice, where for two years she is undermined with grief and despair, until death puts an end to her anguish.

"Shut up in a convent she remains in utter ignorance of the doings of the outer world. The faint rumour of a criminal trial at Rennes, at the other end of France as it were, does not even reach her; she will never know that an innocent man has been convicted instead of her guilty husband.

"She dies amongst strangers, abandoned by everyone, after having given birth to a daughter, Mademoiselle de Trémeillan, your intended wife.

"And now, Monsieur, I have told you, in as few words as possible, the drama you wished to know. And now, Monsieur, comes the question of reinstating Jean Torquenié in the eyes of the law and the world. To do this you must prove to a court of justice that Count de Trémeillan was the murderer of Marcellin de Mortrée, and that he ordered Marianne Torquenié to be killed.

"Here are the documents; it now remains with you to do what you call your duty."

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR the first few hours after his interview with Monsieur Rousseau, Armand felt dazed and unable to connect his thoughts—in fact, struck by a blow so violent as to have stunned him. For many minutes at a time he sat, as if petrified, at his writing-table, staring at the terrible bundle of documents—that “first brief,” as it were, for which he had been so anxious in his youthful dreams of ambition, and which, now that he had it, it plunged him into such a terrible state of fear.

He kept asking himself what he was to do, what resolution he was to take. To pursue the reinstatement of Jean Torquenié was tantamount to the impeachment of Marguérite’s father. And to drag the latter into a court of justice meant the relinquishing of the young girl who was to be his in a few days, who was to be the chosen companion, dreamt of, wished for during many a year, the girl in whom were centred all his hopes, all his affections.

On the other hand, to give up the defence of that poor, unfortunate man meant to commit an infamous thing, to make himself the accomplice of a crime perpetrated twenty years previously by the black-browed master of “d’Albrays,” to burden his life with everlasting remorse. He did not for a single moment entertain the idea that Monsieur Rousseau might have been mistaken, that the Countess de Trémeillan was as innocent as Marianne. He did not attempt to discuss the proofs. The evidence to him was conclusive. That letter settled the question, and cast a searching light on that mystery of the distant past.

Count de Trémeillan was nothing better than a base assassin. He was, moreover, a coward, who to shirk the responsibility of his crime had allowed an innocent man to be convicted, and with infamous cunning encompassed the ruin of that unfortunate Torquenié.

Therefore, two means only were open to Armand; to give up Marguérite, to ruin his own life, to break the young girl's sweet and affectionate heart, or to disgrace himself by abandoning to his wretched fate the man whom he had sworn to defend. The struggle was a long and painful one; so painful as to cause the tears to run down the young fellow's cheeks; while the battle between love and duty waged fiercely in his heart and bruised it cruelly.

At last he rose, pale and resolved. Armand d'Arcay had become a different man. He was no longer the gentle, careless young fellow, somewhat spoilt by the affection of two women, his mother and his intended wife, whose love had filled up his infancy and his youth, whose dream had been of a calm and happy existence bounded by the modest horizon of domestic joys to which he meant to confine his future. He was a man determined, energetic, whose pale and inspired face stood out in bold relief from his dark surroundings.

The painful accomplishment of a sublime duty had, as it were, invested him with the calm halo of the martyr. He had just resolved upon the sacrifice of what was more to him than his life. He felt conscious that after having travelled unflinchingly, with a bold and firm step, the terrible road he had mapped out for himself, he would not only die of grief himself, but would perhaps kill the being he loved more than himself.

But come what might he was determined to go to the bitter end.

He kept pacing up and down the room for a while, his arm folded across his breast, his head bent low.

He was looking for the means of proving the innocence of his fortunate client, and in order to do this, he beheld only one road open to him ; to compel the Count de Trémeillan and those who aided him to confess their crime. There was no doubt that la Terreuse was among the latter.

He still clung to a last hope. The Count de Trémeillan, finding that he was suspected and about to be handed over to justice, might in his despair hit upon some inspiration that would save him from ignominy. Be that as it might, Armand resolved to act without delay. The more cruel the sacrifice, the greater was his obligation to haste its accomplishment.

He was pondering all this in his mind, when Baptiste came in to tell him that there was a woman downstairs who wished to speak to him.

"Who is she?" asked the young barrister.

"I do not know, Monsieur." And Baptiste made a significant grimace, as on the day when he informed his master of the visit of Jean Torquenié.

"Very well, I will be down directly," said Armand.

When he got into the garden he saw a young girl whose appearance struck him deeply. She was wretchedly dressed in a black tattered skirt and a patched shawl, which she had drawn tightly round her, no doubt to conceal the absence of a bodice. The pale face, the features of which were singularly regular and delicate was set off by a head of frizzy, touzled, black hair, like that of a gipsy. The pure oval face was lighted up by a pair of magnificent, flashing, black eyes, staring savagely at everything around her.

"You wish to speak to me?" asked Armand, looking with astonishment at the girl.

Instead of answering she handed him a letter, then quickly put back her hands under her shawl.

Armand opened the letter; it only contained a few lines.

"Monsieur,—To reinstate the father is not enough; his child should be shielded from further misery, from infamy. I met the poor creature yesterday; she was begging, and everyone recoiled from her. It is your duty to assist her and to ensure her future as an honest girl.—EUGENE ROUSSEAU."

Armand felt more than surprised at this brief note, and it struck him that Monsieur Rousseau was adopting a rather strange tone towards him. He felt nettled that a man whom Rennes society has ostracised, should prescribe a rule of conduct and dictate his duty to him in so curt a fashion. His feeling of vexation was shortlived. He came to the conclusion that in spite of the rough tone, Monsieur Rousseau was after all in the right.

His father and the Count de Trémeillan—the madman and the criminal as the old barrister styled them in his unvarnished speech—were responsible for the misery and shame of this poor girl, as they were responsible for the misery and disgrace of Jean Torquenié.

The moment he intended to repair the wrong done by these two men he should thoroughly accomplish the task he had set himself. He should take Jeanne Torquenié by the hand, provide for her, comfort her in her grief, and insure her future as an honest girl.

"The world has fared very badly with you, has not it?" said Armand d'Arcay, drawing nearer to the girl.

The latter seemed startled, and she stared at the young fellow in a kind of daze. It was the first time people said a kind word to, and appeared to take an interest in, her. The girl was so thoroughly overcome as to be unable to answer, save by a violent sob that almost choked her. All at once, and without having spoken a word, her eyes were blinded with tears, while she hid her face in her shawl.

"You shall suffer no more," said Armand gently, when the poor creature's emotion had somewhat subsided. "In this house, Mademoiselle" (and he laid great stress on the last word), "you will meet with nothing but kindness and comforting words. Be disheartened no longer. They insult you in this town because you are the daughter of a convict."

Jeanne Torquenié shuddered, and she gave Armand one of those wild, hunted looks that hardened the expression of her handsome face.

"I can assure you," Armand went on, "that your father has been unjustly convicted. In a very short period his innocence will be acknowledged and made known publicly. And those who insult you now will only pity you and care for you."

She looked at him with a kind of stupor, as if she failed to grasp the meaning of his words.

"Just stay here a moment," said Armand. "I shall be able to tell you directly what we are going to do with you."

Armand went there and then to the drawing-room, where Madame d'Arcay was sitting at needlework.

"Mother, dear," he said, coming to the point at once; "I have come to ask you to help me."

"In what, Armand, dear?" asked Madame d'Arcay, with the tranquil smile of the woman whose lines have fallen in pleasant places.

"To do an act of kindness."

"Let us hear all about it, my dear. You may depend upon me, you know. What can I do? What is it?"

"It is a poor girl who is very wretched, and whom your kindness may save from a worse fate."

In a few words he told her Jeanne Torquenié's story, but without revealing the real name of his *protégée*, nor the powerful interest he felt in her. He told her that he had undertaken to apply for the revision of a sentence of a man who had been wrongly convicted formerly, that the daughter of

that man had left the factory where she was employed because her father's misfortune made her an object of hatred and contempt. He added that the poor girl was dying of want, and that, pending the new trial, which was to take place shortly, it would be an act of charity to take the girl in, to give her some better and cleaner clothing than that she was wearing; in short, to hold out a helping hand to her so that she might not be dragged to her ruin from sheer despair.

Armand had no need to say much to persuade his mother to convert her to his *protégée's* cause. Madame d'Arcay was kind-hearted to a fault, readily sympathising with every misfortune, and endeavouring to make everyone around happy and contented. She grew quite enthusiastic over her son's plans.

"There just happens to be a spare room next to that of my maid in the small pavilion in front. Tell Yvonne to look after the girl. She shall get her some clothes, she shall make her do some needlework, and make her nice and comfortable in that room. Poor child, I will take care of her; you make your mind easy, Armand dear, and if she be a good girl she will be comfortable enough with us until you restore her father to her."

Armand went to consult Yvonne there and then; and a few hours later on, a handsome young girl, wearing the black dress and twill handkerchief the black silk cap and the pleated white chemisette of the Breton women, was sitting at work at the window of a modest but exquisitely clean room. One would have scarcely recognised the poor child who a few hours previously was tramping the streets of Rennes, tattered, and almost barefooted, wretched, driven mad with want, looking askance and vindictively at the passers-by.

She herself seemed hardly to believe in the realisation of her dream. Every now and then she sat quite still, her work dropping in her lap, her

eyes fixed on the narrow street on which her window looked.

When she entered the room but a few minutes before, and found herself treated with so much kindness, provided with clean linen and appropriate clothing, she had felt suffocated, as it were, and the tears had started to her eyes.

Jeanne Torquenié was not a common-place girl. Her proud and very sensitive nature had preserved her from the vulgar pitfalls to which a pretty girl, struggling with want, is generally exposed. Admitted into an asylum, and cast adrift at fifteen, she never knew a mother's counsel, no helping hand had pointed out the right path. But she was naturally honest and scrupulously straightforward. The trials she had undergone for a fault not committed by her, the odious persecution with which society visits the crimes of the parents on the children had developed in her feelings of right and wrong, not to be shaken by anything. The sorrows of her childhood had not altogether withered her heart. She was still capable of loving. And in the sweet atmosphere by which she was now surrounded, she felt springing up into her heart affectionate thoughts to which hitherto she had been a stranger.

Gradually a feeling of peace stole over her. After so stormy and painful a childhood, she found herself all of a sudden and by a supernatural fairy spell, as it were, in a heaven of rest and comfort, and the thought struck her that she had not sufficiently thanked those to whom the unexpected change was due.

She put her work aside and went into the garden to look for someone who could take her to Madame d'Arcay, whom as yet she had not seen.

In the small stable-yard she came upon Armand, who was superintending the groom, getting his trap ready. Daylight was waning fast, but he felt unable to bear the anxiety that tortured him till next morning. He was anxious to get to "d'Albrays" as

soon as possible in order to have the interview that would decide his fate with Count de Trémeillan.

On perceiving Jeanne, Armand came to meet her half-way, asking her what she wanted. The girl told him. "You'll thank my mother to-morrow morning," he said. "Oh, before I forget," he added in a lower tone, "don't tell her your name. You will know later on why I ask you to do so. Your father's name may remind my mother of some painful incidents connected with her life."

Jeanne fixed her large eyes on him. "My father," she said, with some hesitation; "where is he, Monsieur? Can I see him? I would ask his pardon, for I have been very unkind to him. I was not aware that he had been sent to prison unjustly. I thought that he was guilty, and I have suffered so much on his account that I hated him. I cannot bear to think what I have done to him. He took me in his arms, and I flung him off. I cursed him."

"Your father will soon take up his quarters in this town. In after days, perhaps you will be together, and, let us hope, happy." Saying which, Armand got into his trap, and in another moment drove out of the yard.

And the young girl, who looked after him with a feeling of emotion and gratitude, was certainly unable to guess the heroism hidden beneath this calm and modest appearance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARMAND D'ARCAÿ'S horse got rapidly over the few miles between Rennes and the Count de Trémeillan's estate. The faithful animal knew the road well, and knew, moreover, that his master was always in a hurry when he went in that direction. Still, swift as had been the pace, it was almost dark when Armand rolled along the shady drive leading to the house. He called a servant and told him to look to his horse. Then he went up the front steps, the sinking at his heart growing more intense as he proceeded. The heroic resolution, so boldly taken in a moment of excitement, seemed to him now beyond human endurance. How was he to bear the sight of his beloved Marguérite, and the happy and confiding smile with which she would welcome him. He almost wished not to see her. If he could manage to see the Count by himself, there would be, no doubt, a violent, terrible scene; but with him he felt strength enough to go to the bitter end and accomplish his duty. On the other hand, he would not answer for himself if Marguérite, having noticed his arrival, were to beguile him into a corner of the drawing-room, to concoct, as usual, happy plans for the future. He knew well enough that under such conditions the stern duty he had to accomplish would not be proof against his young ardent affection.

When the servant opened the door of the drawing-room to him, Armand stood for a moment on the threshold, undecided, racked with terrible anguish. His legs seemed to give way under him, and he felt as if he would drop down senseless.

Near the window sat Count de Trémeillan, an open

newspaper in his lap, and lost in his usual, sad meditations. A hurried glance through the room revived Armand's courage. Count de Trémeillan was alone. Armand mustered up all his energy and walked firmly up to him. The latter did not seem to have heard him, and it was only when Armand was within a few paces of his chair, that he raised his head and looked at him with a listless air.

"Tell Mademoiselle that Monsieur d'Arcay is here," he said, beckoning to the servant. And without as much as shaking hands with the man who within a few days was to be his daughter's husband he relapsed into his lethargic state.

Armand held up his hand for the servant to stop. "There is no necessity to disturb Mademoiselle," he said. "I must even ask you not to tell her that I am here. I wish to speak to you alone, Monsieur," he added, turning to the Count.

The Count looked at the young fellow in surprise; but Armand pretended not to notice it, and sat down facing him.

"Monsieur," he began, "the matter that brings me here to-day is a very serious one, and I will tell you in a very few words what it is. I have been instructed to apply for a new trial by a man who was convicted twenty years ago, and who maintains that he is innocent. You know the man; you gave him a character at the trial. I must ask you to consult your recollections without a moment's delay, and to tell me whether you really think there was a mistake on the part of his judges."

"What was the individual's name?" asked the Count, listlessly examining his fingertips.

"Jean Torquenié."

Armand had sat down with his back to the light, so as to get the last rays of the sinking sun full on the Count's face. He looked at him intently while saying these two words.

The Count did not budge. Not a muscle of his

face moved. "Oh yes," he said, "I remember. It is a very old story indeed, my dear d'Arcay, and assuredly the poor devil was guilty. There never was the slightest doubt in our mind about it. But I was very sorry for all that, for the man was an excellent servant."

"Then you really do believe in the man's guilt?"

"No doubt I do. Besides, he admitted it himself. Now that I come to think of it, it was your father himself who wrung the confession from him. And I need scarcely tell you that your father was an adept in his profession. What a strange idea of yours to stir all those things of bygone days. I recommend you to let that sad matter rest. The cause is lost beforehand."

"I do not think so," replied Armand in a grave tone of voice. "Torquenié was discharged from prison a few days ago, and he is determined to clear his name from the ignominy of this sentence, which he maintains was an unjust one. He is terribly energetic in his protests. He insists that he has proofs of his innocence, that up till now he was reluctant to make them public out of respect for a family occupying an honoured position in these parts, but his suffering has soured his character, spoilt it, and he refuses to abide any longer by the sentence that disgraced him. He wants to be heard and tell all he knows."

Armand stopped for a moment, then went on in an indifferent tone, "Moreover, I am not particularly anxious to take up the affair, and if you really think there is no chance of a favourable issue, I will tell the man to go and see one of my colleagues. He can tell another barrister whatever he likes."

The Count fixed his cold and piercing glance on Armand's face, as if trying to read his inmost thoughts. That, at any rate, was the young barrister's interpretation of the swift, furtive look.

Count de Trémeillan remained silent for a moment. "Look here," he said at last ; "before you take any further steps, you had better send Jean Torquenié to me. I will question him, and turn him inside out, and am sure that after that he will not dare to maintain his innocence, because I happen to know certain details of the affair which——"

The Count stopped short and relapsed into his silence.

But Armand took up the parable, as it were :—

"I also, Monsieur, happen to know certain details which are so very precise as to make Torquenié's innocence as plain as daylight to me. It was said that he killed Viscount de Mortrée because the latter was the lover of his wife. I know that this is false. The woman whose lover M. de Mortrée was was not Marianne Torquenié.

The Count started from his chair as if moved by a violent, galvanic shock. Then he paced up and down the room for some time, swaying to and fro and evidently under the influence of nervous excitement. At last he returned to where Armand sat, and looking him steadfastly in the face, said, in a voice he vainly endeavoured to control, "And what of that? What more do you know? Speak out. Who was the mistress of the Viscount de Mortrée?"

Armand hesitated for a moment, then he got up and without wincing before his terrible look, firmly said—

"It was the Countess de Trémeillan, Monsieur."

Count de Trémeillan received the violent blow without a muscle moving in his face. He only turned slightly pale ; a lightning-like flash came into his eyes, that was all.

"I will finish, Monsieur, and say all I have got to say," remarked Armand without giving him time to speak. "I have in my possession a letter from the Countess to Monsieur de Mortrée. This letter has laid the whole truth bare to me, and it has at the

same time been the flash of lightning whereby I read the innocence of that unfortunate man, convicted of crime he did not commit. After that I began to cast about for the probable author of the Viscount's murder, of Marianne Torquenié's death by poison. And the evidence pointed clearly to one and the same man, which man is no one else but you, Monsieur de Trémeillan."

"Oh, indeed, you came to that conclusion, Monsieur," said Count de Trémeillan, in a voice big with anger, ready to burst forth like a thunder-clap.

"Are you still of opinion that I had better give up this case, that I had better confide the documents relating to it to another barrister?" asked Armand.

The Count's face turned somewhat more livid still. He hung his head, he kept his eyes fixed on the floor, as if in search of something whereon to fix them. At last he appeared to have made a desperate resolve. He drew himself up to his full height and resumed the proud and supercilious attitude habitual to him.

"And if it were so, Monsieur?" he said. "Suppose the Viscount de Mortrée inflicted the most cruel injury upon me one man can inflict upon another, who would dare blame me for my revenge?"

"But in order to do so with impunity, Monsieur, you have had a poor woman assassinated, an innocent man thrown into prison——"

Count de Trémeillan shuddered and turned away his head. He dropped into his armchair in the sombre and dreamy attitude Armand had so frequently noticed, and it gave the young barrister the clue to the savage moods that constantly darkened the Count's character. He guessed that this old man was ever racked with terrible remorse.

"I ask you once more," said the Count in a curt

and jerky tone, "to send Torquenié to me. I will settle the business with him. If he wants money he shall have it. . . . That letter, Monsieur, that letter, who gave it to you? Have you got it with you? Give it to me." Then, after a slight pause, and with a violent effort, he went on, "Yes, you were right; the Countess de Trémeillan was unfaithful, and I punished her lover. But you understand well enough, do not you, that at the very moment you are going to marry my daughter it is your duty to destroy every trace of that sad story. Give me that letter."

"You evidently do not understand me, Monsieur," said Armand d'Arcay in a grave tone. "Jean Torquenié does not ask for money; he wants his name cleared from the stigma attaching to it; he wants the ignominy of convict prison wiped off his front, he wants his honour, of which you have robbed him. I have promised to help him with all my strength, and I will keep my promise. I will not be your accomplice, Monsieur. If necessary, I will be your accuser. True, I worship your daughter; true, the dream of my life has been to make her my wife, and I swear that I should prefer death to giving her up. But there is within me a voice that speaks louder even than my love . . . and that is the voice of my conscience, Monsieur. I share to a certain extent the responsibility of this crime with you. As you reminded me just now, it was my poor father who conducted the preliminary investigations in the Torquenié affair; and who, consumed already with fever, his brain excited with the disease that was to kill him eventually, displayed a zeal such as to compel the unfortunate man to confess himself guilty of a crime he had not committed in order to escape from a cruel persecution. After that you will understand the duty I have to perform. And, I swear to you, I will not fail to do so. Then, rising from his chair, he added, "I am going, Monsieur,

and give you till to-morrow morning to reflect upon the course you intend to pursue." He left the room without any attempt on the Count's part to detain him. A few minutes later he was spinning along the carriage-drive.

Left to himself, the Count bent his head and seemed to listen to the sound of wheels which was soon lost in the distance. Then he angrily rose from his chair; the feelings he had tried to control during his interview with Armand d'Arcay suddenly found vent. He paced up and down the drawing-room with a kind of savage energy, swaying to and fro, his lips livid with frenzy, and jerking forth half-finished sentences. For the time being he became what he had been in his younger days, the creature half-mad with excitement, who had inflicted such cruel sufferings upon the unhappy Countess de Trémeillan.

For the last twenty years, ever since the crimes planned and carried out with such cold-bloodedness, the character of the Count de Trémeillan had changed. The impetuosity, the raving fits of anger had ceased. They seemed to have become condensed into a kind of melancholy lethargy. He lived, as it were, within himself, the head weighed down by poignant sorrow: his heart constantly gnawed perhaps by the canker of remorse.

And now this remorse assumed a shape, became endowed with a soul, and uprose to accuse him in a loud voice. All of a sudden the ashes of the past were kindled anew and the shadows became lighted up by a lurid flame. The dead had not buried their dead, and that which he believed to have sunk into oblivion for evermore reappeared and confronted him threateningly. It seemed to him that he had been asleep for twenty years and that he was now awakened on the morrow of the crime, face to face with the law, who demanded an account of what he had done.

And after the fit of terror which made him retreat to a corner of the drawing-room, huddled together, prostrate, unable to articulate a syllable, there came a sudden access of revolt ; he roared like a wounded lion, he would not surrender ; nay, he repented having let Armand go, not having strangled the secret in his throat. He raved liked an angry madman. What that Torquenié, that scum of the earth, dared come out of his prison and accuse him ?

Were not these folk merely born to pay for their lords and masters.

His mind, fed upon all the excesses of the feudal ages, brought back the times when the vilein did not make so many objections to yield to his lord his wife, his honour, his life.

And with the impotent fury of a child he grew indignant with the times, with events, with the men who had dared to change so perfect a condition of things.

All at once, as if a sudden idea had struck light into his mind, as if salvation had appeared to him on the very brink of the abyss, he flung himself on the bell and rang it violently.

"Tell Mademoiselle de Trémeillan that I wish to see her," he shouted to the servant, who came at the summons. And dropping once more into the arm-chair, he endeavoured to control the boiling, seething passion within.

When Marguérite, handsome and tranquil as ever, appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room, Count de Trémeillan had relapsed into the sad, dreamy attitude habitual with him. Nothing appeared to have occurred to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was still very early when, on the following morning, Baptiste, looking rather upset, came to tell his master that someone wished to see him. Armand was in his room, looking for the twentieth time, perhaps, through the documents of the terrible case he had undertaken.

At the mute but questioning glance of the young barrister, Baptiste seemed to hesitate, but at last, as if unable to keep the secret confided to him any longer, he said in a low voice, "It is Mademoiselle de Trémeillan."

"Marguérite!" exclaimed Armand, turning very pale, and rushing to the door of the back staircase, on which his room opened.

A lady closely veiled entered the room quickly. She was evidently much exhausted, for she dropped into the first chair within her reach.

"You may go, Baptiste," said Armand to the old servant, "and be careful not to say a word to anyone."

When left to themselves Armand flung himself on his knees before Marguérite de Trémeillan, and took both her hands, which were cold as ice, in his.

His heart was wrung with anguish; he did not dare guess the truth, and still he knew why Marguérite, pale and trembling, came to him at such an hour. He felt that the Count de Trémeillan had wanted to play his last trump, and that he had been base enough to enlist in his defence this pure, chaste soul, whom he ought never to have dragged into this.

Marguérite made an effort to master the emotion

that shook her whole frame. She flung her arms round the neck of Armand, who was still kneeling by her side, and looking at the young fellow with eyes bright with feverish excitement and suffused with tears, she said in a broken voice, "Why did not you send for me last night?"

"Did you know I came to the house?" he asked, turning pale with apprehension.

"Yes, I know everything."

"What," he exclaimed, "your father told you——"

"Everything," repeated Marguérite with a suppressed sob.

"But it can't be," said Armand, revolting at the idea; "he cannot have told you."

"I tell you that he told me everything; he has been absolutely pitiless. My dearest recollections, my most cherished affections, my modesty as a young girl—he trampled everything under foot. You may well pride yourself upon what you have done. You have killed me."

And she dropped her head on her breast with a gesture of harrowing despair, while her sobs, suppressed for a long while found vent, and the tears welled forth again as they had done during the whole of the night.

Armand stood like petrified, dumb-stricken, finding no word of comfort for her.

"Great Heaven, great Heaven," moaned the poor girl, hiding her face in her clenched hands; "I was too happy, and it could not last. And it is you, you, who strike the blow. What evil spirit prompted you to do it? Why did you consent to become my father's accuser? No, you have never cared for me. "My life has been divided between two affections," she went on in a heartrending tone, that for my mother and that for you. Both these affections have been trampled upon. My mother was not the saint-like woman I believed her to be, and you, you have sacrificed me, like the merest stranger, to a chance

beggar, who came to implore your aid. What has happened to you ; I fail to understand it, and I can make out but one thing, that you do not love me, that you never did love me."

Marguérite was so terribly excited that it seemed impossible to soothe her, to allay her despair. Nevertheless, Armand wished to make an effort to defend himself, but how could he make the poor child listen to reason, carried away as she was by the passion that wrung her very soul. Armand took her in his arms, and with kind and loving words endeavoured to soothe her violent grief. He perceived but too well that this could only be done by extenuating the conduct of the mother, of whom Marguérite cherished so pious a recollection, which Count de Trémeillon had ignobly bespattered. Armand, furthermore, understood the full bearing of the bold attempt on the Count's part. To defend himself, to silence the accusing voice of the past, he had told Marguérite everything. He had told her of her mother's offence, of the punishment he had meted out to her partner in guilt. Then, slurring over the innocent man who had been convicted in his stead, he had added that Armand was bent upon having a new trial, and upon becoming his accuser. He, the Count, knew the love, the respect of Marguérite for that poor mother whom she had never known. He had had no difficulty in showing her that, if that trial ever took place, the memory of the Countess de Trémeillon would be publicly disgraced, that the offence, so carefully hushed up by him for twenty long years, would be brought to light, that the first and foremost thing to do was to avoid a like scandal, and that in order to do this, Armand had to be appealed to there and then for the surrender of the documents he had in his possession.

After these cruel revelations, Marguérite had spent a terrible night. She failed to understand the sudden madness that had taken hold of her intended

husband. She even went so far as to surmise that he no longer cared for her, and that he had stirred up this scandal in order to break his engagement. For hours the poor child was racked with anguish, the scalding tears being only interrupted by violent sobs that almost broke her heart.

At the first faint streak of daylight she dressed hurriedly, and, accompanied by a servant, drove to Rennes to beseech Armand to desist.

"Listen to me, dearest," said Armand, drawing her lovingly towards him. "Let me justify myself, let me plead for those two affections of your heart, your mother and your intended husband." Then he led her gently to a chair and knelt at her feet.

His mother had told him all the particulars of Count de Trémeillan's marriage, he knew that that union had been a martyrdom to the poor Countess. These particulars, of which Marguérite was utterly ignorant, and which, until then, he had carefully withheld from her, he now told her.

"I have often heard you say, darling," he began, "that you would sooner die than be married to a man you could not love. Can you imagine what your poor mother must have suffered, when married against her wish the moment she left the convent-school. It was a family arrangement, and she was not even consulted. Your mother was of a sweet and loving disposition, the soul of honesty. Even under the conditions in which she married she would have become attached to her husband if the latter had shown her some affection and kindness. But he was hard and cold, indifferent to any and everything that generally moves the soul of man. Apart from his political views, which his education has invested with a kind of apparent fanaticism, there is not a single chord of his heart responding to the human touch. Moreover, and also owing to the fatal prejudices of bygone ages, he has taught himself to

look upon woman as merely an inferior being intended to play an altogether passive part, and not having the right to look or to go beyond the narrow circle of domestic pursuits.

"A woman is bound to love once in her life. Unless her marriage provides her with the romance dreamt of in her girlhood she is the most wretched, the most unhappy of creatures, and she is bound to look for it elsewhere. It is not your poor mother who was to blame, Marguérite; it is not her whom we should accuse, but rather those absurd social customs which make of marriage a kind of business contract in which affection plays no part. The real guilty ones, when such a misfortune does occur are the parents who bartered their child for a title or for money.

"Your mother was too loyal to accept such a disgraceful bargain. She claimed the right to break the bonds that had become a martyrdom. Ah, if you had been there she would have suffered that martyrdom to the bitter end. She has said as much in a letter which I have seen. But she was alone in the world, alone with that hard and brutal man whom she hated. And she met in her path with a deep-seated affection, with an ardent devotion, She was not proof against it. She wanted to go, like the honest woman she was, and have nothing more in common with the man who was her husband in the eyes of the law, but whom, before God, she denied. Her only husband was Marcellin de Mortrée. She threw herself in his arms, imploring him to deliver her from an existence that became more hateful to her each moment. Where is the woman who would dare cast the first stone at her. Where is the man who would not pity and absolve her from the bottom of his heart?"

As Armand went on, Marguérite had gradually raised her head and her tears had ceased to flow. She sat looking at her betrothed in a kind of ecstasy

eagerly drinking in the words which moved her to the very soul.

"You are kind," she said after a moment's silence; "you try to soothe the terrible pain he gave me."

Then after another interval, "Now be kind to the end, and give up the fatal idea of involving my father in this trial."

"You know that an innocent man has been convicted in his stead, that he spent twenty years in prison, that he loudly clamours to have his innocence publicly proved, and that he is fully justified in thus agitating."

"Ah, you do not care for me," repeated poor Marguérite in despair. "If you cared for me would you fling my future, my life, my love in the scale against the interests of a stranger whom the merest accident brought to your door?"

"I see that Monsieur de Trémeillan has not told you everything," said Armand d'Arcay in a grave tone of voice. Then he told her of the part his own father had enacted in the drama; he pointed out to her that he would be the basest of men and unworthy of her affection if he refused his aid to the poor wretch who had come to ask him for it.

"Besides," he went on, "cannot you see that it is in your father's own interest that I must undertake this case? To offer money to Torquenié is absolutely useless. He will not relinquish the one idea that has haunted him these twenty years. He wants his name cleared from the stigma attached to it, he wants to be reinstated in public opinion, he insists upon a new trial. If I refuse to assist him he will consult another lawyer. That one will assuredly not have the same motives in conducting the case cautiously, and, as a matter of course, there will be a public scandal. Your mother's name, which you respect, which you idolise, will be dragged into court. Her false step, extenuated by circumstances, will be represented as the vulgar fall of a

dishonest woman ; she will be dragged through the mud, held up to ignominy."

"Stop ! stop, Armand, say no more. My poor mother !" And Marguérite, choking with tears, dropped her head heavily on her intended husband's shoulder.

"You see, therefore, that we must avoid such a scandal at any cost. And in order to this he who is most guilty must sacrifice himself."

"What do you mean ?"

"Listen. Your father must go away, must leave France. I have been thinking this over all night, and I believe that my plan is the only feasible one. Therefore let him go. During his absence the preliminary investigations in the Torquenié affair will take place. We will manage to proceed carefully and very little will leak out. Your father's accomplice at that time must have been that strange woman we saw one night, you remember don't you ; I mean *la Terreuse*. The creature is devoted to him, body and soul. The brunt of the charge will probably recoil on her ; I mean the assassination of Marianne. Your father will only have to answer for the death of Viscount Marcellin, and the extenuation of the deed will be found in his wrath at the injury done to him. We will find a barrister who will conduct his defence in that sense, and who will keep your mother's name as much as possible out of the question.

"Monsieur de Trémeillan will perhaps be convicted, but his sentence will be a light one, and his flight will obviate the consequences of it. Make him understand all this, Marguérite ; tell him that instead of laying the blame at my door, he ought to thank his stars that the case fell into my hands. Tell him above all to go away without a moment's delay."

Marguérite de Trémeillan remained silent for a moment. Her position was such a strange one, she had suffered so much during that terrible night that

she felt completely undone and incapable of making an effort to collect her thoughts.

"I must be going," she said, rising from her chair. "Give me to-day to consider all this. I have not got an idea in my head; my eyes burn; I can scarcely hold myself up." And in fact, she positively reeled when endeavouring to rise, and Armand had to support her.

"Marguérite, my beloved Marguérite," he said; "God tries our affection for one another very severely. We were too happy. Our existence went by too sweetly, too peacefully. Do not you think I also feel my heart terribly wrung at the thought that you may cease to care for him whom fate compels him to be the accuser of your father? Nevertheless, I have gone on. However cruel, however painful my duty, I have performed it to the bitter end. But I want you to know, dearest, that, whatever happens, I will not cease to worship you as I do, and that I shall feel proud to give you my name."

"Ah, you love me, you love me," said Marguérite, nestling in Armand's arms.

"Tell me again and again. Yes, you are right, it is fate that is crushing us with this heavy burden. Forgive me for having doubted you. I felt how much you loved me just now when you spoke to me of my poor mother.

"Therefore, Armand dear," she went on after a slight pause and drawing a long sigh; "therefore, Armand dear, do your duty. I depend upon your love for me to spare my father as much as possible. You know how proud he is. A trial like that might kill him."

"Make your mind easy on that score, dearest. And now, darling, I now beseech you to faithfully accomplish the part I have traced out for you. Try to induce the Count to leave France as soon as possible. You know why I ask you to do this. We have everything to fear from his violent temper."

It was broad daylight by now. Armand rang the bell and told his faithful Baptiste to take *Maisie* de Trémeillan by the servant's staircase, so that, if Madame d'Arcay happened to be up, there should be no fear of her meeting the young girl.

Armand had the satisfaction of seeing the young girl depart in a much more tranquil and strong frame of mind than she had come. She promised to despatch a servant in the course of the day to let him know the decision of Count de Trémeillan.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE are some happy natures who go through life blindfolded, without least suspicion of the cruel dramas, the mysterious and terrible events going on under their very noses. They show misfortunes a kind of dull, passive courage, against which the breakers of the most heartrending grief dash in vain. They crave for peace, contentment, and quiet joy, and the moment they have attained these, they, as it were, shut themselves up, entrench themselves in them, and instinctively avert their eyes from any and everything that might disturb them.

Such was Madame d'Arcay; and it was not the least original feature of this strange drama to see this mother, kind, loving, devoted to a fault, pursue her tranquil life amidst the harrowing events in which the happiness, nay, the very life of her son were at stake. She was simply leading the existence of the well-to-do provincial lady of position, superintending the minutest details of her home, so that her dear Armand, when he married, might find everything in apple-pie order. Looking neither to the right, nor the left, she went straight before her

on that road, blind to the lines care was stamping on Armand's brow; for ever smiling and content; occupied solely with the great event impending, which she expected to be fraught with every happiness for her son.

This "Mark Tapleyism" invested her with a strength of character that had shown itself proof against certain trials which undoubtedly would have shattered the health and spirits of any other woman. For many years she had suffered the most cruel torments that can befall a woman. She had witnessed the protracted agony, the living death of the man she loved. But during that mental and moral torture she had borne up by virtue of an astonishing courage, of an invincible hope that remained deaf to, uninfluenced by, the most formal verdicts of science, the evidence of facts.

Nothing on earth would have induced Armand to trouble this profound peace. Before his mother he strained every nerve to preserve his ordinary looks and demeanour, to hide his mental preoccupations, though he succeeded but indifferently in concealing his grief.

As it happened there was no need of dissimulation. With the optimism natural to her, Madame d'Arcay attributed the frequent absent-mindedness of her son to all but the right cause. She could not possibly surmise the truth. Seeing him more pre-occupied, more taciturn than usual, she thought him to be lost in love-dreams, she supposed him to be utterly engrossed by the excitement of his coming marriage.

During breakfast, after the unexpected visit from Marguerite de Trémeillan, Armand was particularly silent and thoughtful. His mother, comfortably ensconced in her tapestry arm-chair, cast a smiling glance at him now and again, she seemed to be inwardly amused at his youthful love-dreams, and was careful not to break in upon them. When they

had nearly finished, Baptiste handed a letter to Armand. It had arrived that very moment and was apparently urgent.

Madame d'Arcay cast a sidelong glance at it while Armand opened it and recognised Marguérite's handwriting. Another smile played on the kind lady's lips, whose face scarcely showed any signs of age. The young people every now and again wrote to one another like this when they were not to meet during the day. Madame d'Arcay flattered herself that she knew pretty well the contents of the letter, and when Armand left the table she looked after him with a silent little chuckle, while sipping her steaming hot coffee.

As soon as the door was closed upon him, Armand read the letter he had just received for the second time.

"I have just seen my father," it ran. "He refuses to go, and declares that he will stand the chance of a trial and defend himself to the bitter end. All my efforts to dissuade him were met with an inflexible and savage determination. He was more harsh and unkind than ever. When he spoke of my mother his eyes absolutely flashed, and he looked at me furiously, as if I were partly to blame for the whole of the thing. I feel desperate, and you, Armand, must save me, and shield my mother's memory. This trial must be prevented at all costs. See Jean Torquenié and offer him money. Try to prevail upon him to leave the country. I will part with everything I possess, but, for Heaven's sake, do not allow that dear memory to be dragged through the mire. Answer this, try to set my mind at rest a little bit. You have no idea what I am suffering, dearest, and you, at any rate, will not add to my grief. Spare me, and remember that I am innocent of all these crimes. Have some pity on her who loves you so dearly.—MARGUÉRITE."

As he read on the tears came to Armand's eyes,

and his heart was wrung with anguish. His emotion, in fact, became almost too great to be borne, for he could scarcely credit the contents of the letter, which he read over and over again, noticing meanwhile the unsteady, feverish handwriting.

Still, there it was, and in order to screen himself, the Count de Trémeillon was determined to lay all the blame on a poor woman, who had fallen, through weakness no doubt, but much more so from despair and through his fault. Was it ignoble cowardice that dictated this conduct, or the craving for a still greater revenge on the poor, unfortunate creature that had offended him?

Having gained a very clear insight into Count de Trémeillon's character by now, Armand felt inclined to abide by the latter supposition. This country gentleman, whose refinement was scarcely skin-deep, had many affinities with the mere peasant. In spite of his assuming towards the latter the conduct of the despotic king towards his subjects, in spite of his supercilious contempt, in spite of his high and mighty aristocratic pretensions, it was easy enough by scratching the magnificent veneer to find the coarse clay of the country lout. He was as brutally violent, as covertly vindictive, as deeply cunning as the latter; in addition to having the latter's ferocious selfishness and the latter's heart of flint.

After Armand's unexpected visit he had taken in his critical situation at a glance, and immediately made up his mind as to the course to pursue in order to get the best of this unlooked-for adversary.

He certainly never expected to be confronted by Armand. Whenever the memory of the past haunted him, whenever the dread of his crime took possession of him, he was far from suspecting that he, who should tear off his mask one day, would be the dreamy, sentimental, easy-going young fellow whose mind seemed utterly engrossed with his youthful love-passion.

The deep cunning of the Count de Trémeillan, which had shown itself already once when he had contrived to have an innocent man convicted in his stead, had shown itself a second time in choosing Armand d'Arcay for his son-in-law.

As Armand had told Marguérite, his fortune was far from being equal to Monsieur de Trémeillan's. Nor could he offer any compensation in this respect to the Count's pride of birth by the prestige of an ancient name. No, it was neither his position, nor his name, nor even the great love he bore Marguérite that had facilitated his suit with the Count. The latter simply felt that consideration, not unmingled with fear, towards judges and barristers which is generally shared by French country-people, especially if their conscience does not happen to be a very clear one.

He nursed the secret hope that, if ever the authorities took it into their heads to rake up the past, his son-in-law would take up his cudgels and defend him. Hence, the reader may imagine his disappointment, his fury at finding himself threatened by the very man whose aid he had hoped to secure by the sacrifice of his prejudices and his pride. Nevertheless, he contrived to control himself, and to dissimulate his anger. Instead of brutally daring his accuser to do his worst, instead of opposing a violent denial to the charge which might have goaded the young barrister into collecting his proofs and to drive him into a corner, he had parried the blow in a much bolder fashion. At the risk of breaking the poor girl's heart, he had placed Marguérite between Armand and himself. He felt perfectly secure that in order to "get at him" Armand would never consent to harm the girl he idolised. He knew well enough that when the reputation of her mother was at stake Marguérite would never allow Armand to bring the matter into court.

That is why he had overwhelmed the poor child

with those horrible revelations, why he had not scrupled to sully that young heart, to tear asunder the veil painted in sweet and poetic colours in which Marguérite loved to enwrap the vision of the Countess de Trémeillan.

He screened himself behind the filial tenderness of Marguérite, behind the passionate love of Armand.

This conduct was, no doubt, the reverse of chivalrous, but it was very prudent and very cunning. He made absolutely certain that, after Marguérite's visit, Armand would give up all idea of this absurd affair, and that this duty which he invoked so loudly would not be proof against his love. Consequently, he was beside himself with fury when at her return Marguérite told him that Armand, far from intending to give up the affair, was more than ever determined to defend Jean Torquenié, and to unmask the real criminal. Nevertheless, he strained every nerve to moderate his anger, and to control the violence of his character, which at that moment might have led him to lay hands brutally on the poor child who stood pale and trembling before him.

But he persisted in his resolution. He refused to throw up the sponge and to fly without fighting, as Armand demanded. His obstinate, stubborn peasant nature hugged the idea that Armand would never dare push things to the bitter end, and that Marguérite, in order to save her mother's reputation, would use her power over her intended husband to make him give up the affair.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER having read the young girl's letter over and over again, Armand went into the garden and sat himself down under a tree, trying to collect his thoughts and to find a means to solve the hopeless situation.

He felt utterly crushed with anxiety and emotion, and asked himself whether he would have sufficient courage to pursue the task he had set himself to the end. The duty he had assumed with such noble courage seemed at present a load too heavy to be borne.

There was no denying it, the load utterly crushed him. His heart revolted against the injustice of fate which flung the burden of those crimes of the past full upon innocent people. He even went so far as to think of flying with Marguérite, to pass his life with her in some remote spot, whither those voices of the past could not penetrate and trouble his happiness.

While pondering all this he held his head with both hands, his elbow resting on his knee in an attitude of profound despondency. When he looked up at last he noticed a large shadow on the gravel before him. Then he drew himself up. Jean Torquenié was standing before him, hat in hand, looking clean and neat. He stood waiting respectfully for the young man to awaken from his apparently deep reverie.

The unexpected appearance of the discharged convict tallied so thoroughly with Armand's present thoughts, that the latter uttered a cry and suddenly

started to his feet, as if the spectre called forth by his imagination had uprisen before him.

"What brings you here?" he asked, in a kind of terrified voice.

This somewhat abrupt welcome seemed in no way to distress Jean Torquenié.

"I have been told, Monsieur," he said, drawing closer to Armand, "that I owe my leave to stay in Rennes to your influence. It is another kindness on your part, for which I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

And seeing that Armand did not answer, he went on. "And now, Monsieur, I have only to ask one more favour. Tell me, if I may expect my trial to come on shortly? Have you done anything in my behalf? Have you found the real criminal? Oh! Monsieur, since I had the good fortune to meet with you ten days ago at Evreux I have been expecting a letter from you every minute. I sent you my address. Did not you get my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter," replied Armand who, notwithstanding his own grief, could not help pitying the poor fellow. "But you will easily understand that a few days do not suffice to find a criminal of twenty years' standing. Give me time to look about me."

Then, wishing to give the wretched man a slight gleam of happiness and to divert his mind from the fixed thought that tortured it, he beckoned to the gardener who was close to them and whispered a few words to him. The latter ran immediately towards a small pavilion which did duty as the servants' quarters.

In a few moments the door of the building was opened and a young girl, plainly dressed, appeared on the threshold. For a little while she stood perfectly still and hesitating, then she mustered up courage and advanced quickly towards the clump of trees, amidst which Armand and Jean Torquenié were standing.

Her step was so light, and she took such care to keep close to the grass, lest she should make the gravel creak beneath her feet, that she got close to Jean Torquenié without the latter, wholly wrapt up in his own thoughts, suspecting her of being there. She still seemed to hesitate, but, encouraged by a smile from Armand, she came forward and said in a soft tone, "Father, father."

Jean Torquenié staggered as if he had been struck full in the chest. He swung rather than turned round, and a convulsive sob broke from his lips. "Jeanne, Jeanne, my child!" he gasped, as the girl threw herself into his arms, and he covered her face and neck with frantic kisses.

"Forgive me, forgive me, poor father!" sighed Jeanne, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I grieved you very much, I did not know, I was so wretched myself."

"Heaven be thanked!" said Jean Torquenié, laughing and crying at the same time. "Heaven be thanked for this joy! I never thought I should see you again. I knew you were poor and unhappy, and now you are happy and looking well, and I hold you in my arms, you no longer spurn me. Ah, Monsieur, it is to you I owe this also. Great heavens! this happiness is almost too much for me, after having suffered as I have. I feel that I shall choke."

And Torquenié dropped on the seat occupied by Armand a few moments previously. He had turned ghastly pale with emotion—in fact, he looked as if choking. Jeanne was obliged to unfasten his handkerchief and to unbutton his coat to bring him to. Then he took the girl, who had sat down by his side, in his arms, strained her passionately to his breast, and put his lips on her forehead in a long, long, loving kiss. For a long while he sat staring into space, and as if in a dream. The recollection of his twenty years of shame and anguish had no doubt come back to his

mind, he felt unable to realize the small gleam of joy that had befallen him.

Armand thought it better to leave the sorely tried father and daughter to savour their happiness by themselves. He himself felt powerfully affected. But before he went away he told Torquenié that he had another bit of good news for him, that Maître Rousseau had been back in Rennes for some time, and at the same time he gave him the old barrister's address.

"I will go and see him, Monsieur," said Torquenié, for he has been very kind to me in years gone by, but I'll have no other counsel but you. "Ah, Monsieur," he added, "I am crying, but I am crying for joy. How shall I tell you all I feel, how shall I express my gratitude to you! My little Jeanne. . . ." He looked long and lovingly at his daughter, then he concluded, "If her poor mother were not dead I might fancy I was sitting next to her. The likeness is so striking."

Armand returned to the house and went to speak to his mother. Under these terrible circumstances he wished to be nearer Marguérite; until the painful crisis was passed, until the curtain had fallen upon the drama in which he was mixed up, he wished to be close to the scene of action, within reach of the events, which henceforth might succeed one another rapidly. Moreover, he felt the necessity of being near the Count de Trémeillan, whose every step he wanted to watch.

He asked his mother to take up her quarters for a few days at Mesnil.

"You are not near enough to your liking?" said the old lady with her tranquil smile. "Very well, we will start to-morrow. Too late to-morrow?" she added quickly, noticing a movement of impatience on Armand's part. "Very well, we will go this very day."

"Oh, mother dear, how kind you are!" exclaimed Armand, throwing his arms round her neck.

There was no need of many preparations, and two hours later they were at Mesnil.

Armand had told Jeanne Torquenié to come and join them when they liked, and promised them quarters in the house.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE moment he was in the tiny room at Mesnil that had been the silent witness of so many lovers' dreams, Armand wrote a line to Marguerite to tell her of his arrival.

He asked her at the same time to see him that evening in order to settle the course to pursue under the painful circumstances. They were to meet at a grand cedar tree on one of the lawns at "d'Albrays," around which there ran a seat where they had spent many a warm summer evening. Shortly before night-fall Jean Torquenié arrived at Mesnil accompanied by Jeanne. The moment he had crossed the gates he left the girl in the park and asked to be taken to Armand.

The poor fellow seemed greatly affected, very agitated. "Ah, Monsieur," he exclaimed, the moment he caught sight of Armand, "I know everything, Monsieur Rousseau has told me. I know by now the sacrifice you are imposing upon yourself by taking up my case. But I will not accept it."

"Would you consent not to ask for a new trial?" asked Armand, whose strength forsook him for a moment at the gladsome idea that there might be an end of his torture.

"Give up the idea of proving my innocence," exclaimed Torquenié excitedly. "No, Monsieur, I will not do that; for my daughter's sake I must not do

so. But I wish another barrister to take up the case. You are innocent of all this, Monsieur, and it is neither right nor just that you should suffer on my account."

"You have suffered because of my father," said Armand, in a grave tone. He had recovered all his energy and felt ashamed, as of an act of cowardice, of the gladsome impulse of the moment before. "God is just, my friend; and we are to bow down to his will. As for myself, I will be guided by Him to the last; I have pledged you my oath to reinstate you in the world's opinion and I will keep my oath. Besides, it is better, even for the sake of those who are very dear to me, that the case should remain in my hands.

"And now that you know everything," Armand went on, turning to Torquenié, "sit down here and let us talk the matter over once more. Perhaps you will be able to give me some useful and accurate information.

"First of all," said Armand, after having beckoned Torquenié to a chair close beside him, "did you ever notice the intimacy which must have existed between Viscount de Mortréé and Madame de Trémeillan?"

"In fact, Monsieur, for the last hour or so, since Monsieur Rousseau told me everything, I have been trying to collect my thoughts and to remember. But twenty years have gone by, and, as you may imagine, some things must have slipped my memory. Still, I recollect that Madame de Trémeillan was at the lodge when I brought Viscount de Mortréé thither after his fall off his horse. She often came to see my poor Marianne, of whom she was very fond."

"Do you think she knew the Viscount before that?"

"I do not think so, Monsieur; for I remember that, when I made the Viscount de Mortréé sit down by the fireplace, she asked Marianne his name."

"Then you think that they saw one another for the first time that day?"

"Yes, Monsieur. The day before Viscount de Mortrée left I came upon Madame de Trémeillan near the lodge. She was talking with my wife in the garden. When she saw me she got on her horse and rode away."

"I can see through the whole of the affair now," Jean Torquenié went on after a little while. "My poor Marianne was wrong to mix herself up with the Countess's love-affairs. They saw one another most often at our place. The house stands in a lonely spot, as you know, and I was scarcely ever at home. She only smiled when I objected to the Viscount coming so often to the lodge. I can also account for that sudden illness of hers, for the violent fever that struck her down on the day of Viscount de Mortrée's death. She was probably close at hand when Count de Trémeillan took them unawares, and the sudden fright was too much for her."

"But no one could have suspected all this," remarked Jean Torquenié after a long pause; "and when I cudgelled my brain as to the murderer of Monsieur de Mortrée, I had not the slightest inkling of these matters. My poor Marianne kept them back from me, and God has punished her. If she could have only said a single word before she died! But she did not know even that suspicion had fallen upon me. She was delirious when the authorities searched our house and she died carrying the secret with her to the grave."

"Do not you think that la Terreuse must have played an important part in all this?"

"I am thoroughly convinced she did, Monsieur. She was always pothering about our place. Now that I come to think of it, it was she who must have taken from the little cupboard the carabine which I had not used for the last three years, and which was found after the crime. It is she, yes, it is she, I am certain of it by now, who poisoned Marianne."

Armand strode several times up and down the room, apparently lost in deep thought.

"Did not you tell me," he said at last, "that your daughter Jeanne is marvellously like her mother?"

"It is her living likeness, Monsieur, and it is the likeness that struck me the first time I saw her in one of the little eyots at Rennes. In fact, it was the likeness that made me recognise her on the spot."

Armand lapsed into thought again.

"Baptiste will show you yours and your daughter's rooms. Let me impress upon you the necessity of both keeping out of the way as much as possible until the trial is over."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NIGHT had fairly set in when Armand crossed the park of Mesnil, and got into that of "d'Albrays" by the gap in the wall of which Marguérite had told him the first time they met. He knew the passage well, for he had often made use of it when in a hurry to get to Marguérite and too impatient to go by the high road.

It was a dark night and he felt certain of being able to get to Marguérite without being noticed. It being mild besides, he might count upon having a long chat with his intended.

When he had left the park behind him he made straight for the great lawn, at the far end of which the cold, forbidding walls of "d'Albrays" were dimly visible. The huge and conical outline of the great cedar tree beneath which he had appointed to meet Marguérite loomed indistinctly against the sombre sky and he walked rapidly towards it. But at the moment he got to it, he perceived a huge

shadow detaching itself from it, as it were, and meeting him half-way.

Armand stopped, surprised and overcome with emotion. The shadow had stopped likewise, and stood motionless before him.

"You did not expect me, did you?" said a harsh voice which Armand immediately recognised as that of the Count de Trémeillan.

"Monsieur de Trémeillan," murmured Armand, whose heart was throbbing audibly.

"Yes, Monsieur de Trémeillan. You little thought that I should keep the appointment, Monsieur," the Count went on in a curt voice, which anger had almost changed to a hiss. "Monsieur, from this day forward everything is at an end between you and Mademoiselle de Trémeillan. From this day forth you will not set eyes on her again. If you make the slightest attempt to speak to her, if you attempt to get into the park or into the house, I will shoot you down like a common thief."

"I know that the idea of a murder does not frighten you, Monsieur," replied Armand, who had thoroughly recovered his presence of mind. "But allow me to tell you that your threats do not frighten me in the least. Mademoiselle de Trémeillan is my affianced wife before God; I swear to you that she shall be my wife before the world, and that the obstacles you may place between us will only have the effect of increasing our mutual affection."

"My authority over my daughter is nothing to you, I suppose?" yelled the Count, coming closer to Armand and assuming a threatening attitude.

"The law fixes a limit to the authority of the parents over their children," replied Armand in a perfectly calm but somewhat ironical tone, "and this limit will soon be reached."

"The law, the law," repeated the Count de Trémeillan, exasperated, as it were, by the sound of

the word. "I have never known any other law than my own will, do you understand? I belong to those who command, and do not know how to obey—except the king. I should like to know for whom you take me. Do you think I am blind and mad? Do you think I have my eyes shut to what has been going on around me for the last few years? If I have chosen to have them shut, if I have allowed you to aspire to the hand of Mademoiselle de Trémeillan, if I gave you the hope of being united to her, though such a marriage might almost be considered as a *mésalliance*, if I have done all this, it is because I took you to be a man of honour who would not suffer all those lawyers to molest me for a lot of old and forgotten stories. But instead of defending me, as I hoped you would, as it was your duty to do, it is you who became my accuser. And you think that while you are casting ignominy on my name, I'll allow you to come and go as of old, to see Marguérite or to write to her. No, no, Monsieur, all this is at an end. Henceforth we are strangers, enemies, if you like it better. Ho, ho, you think you will marry Marguérite in spite of me? I pledge you my oath that it shall not be, if I had to send her to the other end of the world, if I had to . . ." He did not finish the sentence, he was almost mad with anger.

"I have warned you," he concluded, "and you had better think it over. You will have to give up Marguérite or that ridiculous law-suit."

"I shall give up neither the one nor the other," said Armand, who had not been slow to perceive what the Count was driving at, with his threats. "Mademoiselle de Trémeillan will be my wife, and Jean Torquenié will be reinstated in public opinion," he went on calmly, but very firmly. "You may put any, and as many obstacles as you like in our way, I will see her for all that. You may intercept my letters as you intercepted the one I wrote to her to-night ;

she shall know that my love and my troth are as firm as ever. You may send her to the other end of the world, I will be able to get to her."

And, without giving him time to retort, Armand abruptly turned his heel upon the Count, after this bold defiance to come between him and the girl he loved.

Perhaps if the darkness had not been so dense the Count might have prevented Armand's going, might have tried to obtain by violence what his threats had failed to obtain. But this black night made him absolutely powerless. Armand only heard the suppressed cries of the old man and his furious imprecations, which gradually died away in the distance.

When he got back to Mesnil he felt crushed with sorrow. The energy he had shown gradually subsided and he found himself confronted once more with the painful reality. He found himself parted from Marguérite; he foresaw the suffering the poor child would have to undergo in the seclusion to which the Count was evidently prepared to condemn her; he knew that he would be pitiless, the man who not once during his life had shown her the affection which every father, however harsh and stern, shows now and then to his child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WAR had been declared, and the struggle had begun; hence the only thing to be done was to push things energetically, and to finish promptly this affair, in which so many great and dear interests were at stake.

Armand immediately started his inquiry with regard to those facts of the past upon which the revelations of Monsieur Rousseau had already cast so vivid a light. He recalled to mind a few words that had been dropped by the Curé of Bonnières one evening in the drawing-room of "d'Albrays." The words had not struck him at the time, and he had paid no heed to them. He did not for a moment suspect then that they could apply in any way to some one connected with him. But now they recurred to him with tenfold force. He remembered that the Curé had said that in the most tranquil and apparently best behaved parts there occurred now and then unpunished crimes and hidden dramas the revelation of which would make people's hair stand on end. Early next morning Armand got quickly over the mile and a half between Mesnil and Bonnières, and rang at the door of the manse.

"The Vicar is in the garden," said the old housekeeper who answered his summons. At the same time she opened a door at the end of the passage which led to a garden bright with flowers, trees, and wall fruit. Armand crossed the threshold and peered about him for several minutes, but he could not see the Vicar anywhere.

The sole living creature, besides himself, was an individual in a blue blouse squatting on his haunches, his head bent forward and perfectly motionless, near the trelliswork on the wall.

"Halloh! I say, my good man," shouted Armand, "have you seen Monsieur Dubois anywhere?"

The man in the blouse, apparently with a great effort, rose from his stooping position and turned his face to the visitor.

"Monsieur Dubois!" exclaimed Armand, greatly surprised.

"It's you, Monsieur d'Arcay," said the Vicar, pushing the brim of his straw hat, which shielded his placid features, off his forehead. "How early you are!"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, rather confused. "I had no idea it was you."

"Of course you had not," said the Vicar, in a cheerful tone of voice. "You only saw my back and could not very well know me by that."

He quickly rubbed his hands against one another to get rid of the mould that was sticking to them, and gave Armand a cordial grip of welcome.

"It is getting hot in the sun," said the Vicar; "we'll be better in this little arbour." Saying which he preceded the young barrister to a corner of the garden where the jasmine and clematis intertwined their branches and made a fragrant nook. He made Armand sit next to him on a wooden seat, took off his spectacles and put them carefully in a case, then he slowly wiped the perspiration off his forehead, and placed his strong, muscular hand on the young fellow's knee.

"It is very nice of you to come and see me like this," he said in his frank and cheerful voice. "I do not look much like a priest, do I?" he went on, pointing to his blouse. "But my flowers don't mind it a bit, and if I had to dig and to prune in my cassock I should be obliged to give it up. By-and-by, when you have rested a bit, I will show you my peaches and strawberries. They are marvels; there is a small corner over there, just in the sun, that produces monsters. It looks as if one were in the land of Canaan. But I give myself a great deal of trouble. The slugs and the moles are enough to drive one crazy. I was just preparing a trap when you came in." . . . The Vicar took out a large chequered pocket handkerchief and blew his nose like a trumpet; then he went on: "And how are all your people?—your dear mother, Count de Trémeillan, and Mademoiselle Marguérite? It is an age since I was at 'd'Albrays.' I suppose the preparations and the triumphal arches are going on

apace. It is fixed for the end of this month, the happy day, isn't it?"

"Yes. . . . Still, it may, perhaps, be put off for a little while," said Armand.

"Put off? And why?"

"Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, pretending not to have heard the question, "you have been in these parts for a great many years, have not you?"

"Thirty years, my son; thirty years last month. Look here, do you see that big pear tree; well, I planted it the very day I came to the manse. It has grown since, and become very strong. It is just the reverse of what has happened to me," he added with a smile.

"Of course you have been a visitor at 'd'Albrays' these many years?"

"I have known the Count for more than twenty-five years. I have always been made very welcome at his house."

"You knew the deceased Countess also?"

Armand fancied that there was a slight quiver about the eyelids of the venerable priest. But it must have been very slight, because the Vicar answered almost immediately and in his calm and smiling way:

"Of course I did."

"She was, it appears, a saintlike woman?"

"She was very kind and very charitable."

"I have been told that the Count did not make her very happy?"

"The Count was somewhat rough in his ways and she on the contrary was very sensitive and refined. Still, it seemed to me that they were happy enough."

The Vicar of Bonnières was evidently at a loss as to the drift of Armand's questions. Nevertheless he stood on his guard instinctively and refused to give himself away. Armand determined to play a bold stroke.

"Monsieur le Curé," he said, "if you were on a

friendly footing with the Count at that time, and if you knew all that happened at 'd'Albrays,' you must remember a certain Jean Torquenié who at that period was Count de Trémeillan's gamekeeper."

"Why do you wish to know?" said the vicar, somewhat confused.

"Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, instead of replying to the question, "has it not always been your firm opinion that Torquenié was innocent?"

The vicar seemed very uncomfortable. He took his spectacles from their case and rubbed them a long while without saying a word. His hands shook.

"Really, my dear Monsieur d'Arcay, I don't know what you are driving at," he said at last.

"I am driving at this, Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, somewhat sharply: "Jean Torquenié has been discharged from prison; he came to see me and swore to me that he was unjustly convicted. He has begged of me to take up his case. I refused at first. I knew that this case had been primarily entrusted to my father, and that the accused had confessed to his crime. Hence, the man's guilt seemed to me beyond doubt. Since then important revelations and positive proofs have shown me that I was mistaken, that the poor wretch has been the victim, in fact, of an error of the law, and, furthermore—the thought is a very horrible, but, nevertheless, a true one—I have come to the conclusion that my father was no longer in his right mind when he interrogated the prisoner and wrung his avowal from him with a kind of morbid frenzy. I am, moreover, certain that the real murderer of Viscount de Mortrée was the Comte de Trémeillan. That is what I have found out, Monsieur le Curé. And seeing that this poor Torquenié's troubles were mainly due to my father, I shall not leave him to his cruel fate. I will stand by him and take the necessary steps to have him reinstated in public

opinion. I, myself, will defend his case in court if needs be. It is my duty, which I will not shirk even though it should break my heart."

And in as few words as possible, almost in one breath, Armand told the old priest what had happened between him and the Count de Trémeillan, his agony at the thought that the Count would wreak his vengeance on Marguérite. He who most likely knew all the particulars of the affair, he begged of him to give him the information that would enable him (Armand) to determine the part of each in that great crime, the reparation for which he was pursuing. He also begged him to see the Count, and to dissuade him from basing his defence on a cruel indictment of the Countess. When Armand began speaking the old priest had been terror-struck, but as the young barrister went on his listener had manifested a growing interest, and at last, when he insisted upon doing his duty and dwelt upon his own suffering, the Vicar could scarcely conceal his deep emotion.

When Armand finished, the priest took both his hands and wrung them fervently, but he turned his head lest the young fellow should perceive the tears that dimmed his glasses. Then, with a powerful effort to control himself, he said, in a grave tone: "I know nothing of all this, my son."

"But it is impossible," said Armand, very excited. "You must have received some communications. Are not you Count de Trémeillan's confessor?"

"I tell you that I know nothing," repeated the old priest, raising his voice.

"The other evening at 'd'Albrays' you dropped a sentence which struck me, and which I kept in my mind. You alluded to unknown crimes, to dramas the existence of which, in our peaceful and pious neighbourhood none would suspect. Were not you thinking at that moment of the murder of the Viscount de Mortrée, of the death of Marianne

Torquenié by poison, of that abominable crime committed by Count de Trémeillan, who sent an innocent man to prison instead of admitting his own misdeed?"

"I repeat to you once more, I know nothing—nothing—nothing. And I beseech you, my son, to question me no further."

"I believe you, Monsieur le Curé," said Armand, submitting to this formal refusal to speak. "In fact, I cannot suppose that, if you had known of the real author of this crime, you could have resisted your desire—your duty—to hand him over to justice."

"We hand over no one, my son. The sinners that come to us are assured that our lips will remain closed for ever on the things they confide to us. We show them the true road to salvation and repentance. If they refuse to follow it, we leave them to God's mercy; but we do not appeal to the justice of men."

The old priest spoke the words in a tone of conviction that made a deep impression on Armand.

"I understand, Monsieur le Curé," he said, rising. "You will excuse my having insisted. I will only ask you for one more favour. Pray that I may have the strength to accomplish my painful duty to the end."

"I will do this gladly, my noble and brave boy," said the priest, clasping Armand's hands in his. "You are performing a good and generous act. God will bless you as his old priest blesses you at this moment. I pity and I admire you."

For a moment they remained silent. The Vicar of Bonnières seemed to be thinking of something. A sharp struggle was evidently going on within. But he came to a decision at last.

"Wait a moment," he said, "I will be back directly. I have not been able to give you what you came for. Still, your journey shall not be fruitless. What I am going to hand you will, I fancy, be of great importance to you."

The old priest went into the house while Armand waited anxiously for the new revelation promised him in such mysterious terms.

At last the Vicar returned. He had a small blue velvet case in his hand. "This case contains a portrait," he said, slightly embarrassed. "It is the portrait of Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée and was sent to me by someone who died far away from here, who suffered much, and whom God has no doubt pardoned. Look at this miniature carefully and then you will understand why I give it to you."

Armand opened the case. He had scarcely cast his eyes on the portrait when he uttered a cry of surprise. "These are Marguérite's features," he exclaimed. "Marguérite is the child of the Viscount de Mortrée."

The priest bent his head in token of mute assent.

"I thank you," said Armand with great enthusiasm; "I thank you for your kindness to me. Nothing shall stop me now. This man is a stranger to us; he was not worthy of being the father of such an angel."

"You should not be too hard on him, though," said the Vicar. "Perhaps he is less guilty than you suspect."

"What do you mean, Monsieur le Curé? Pray go on, tell me all you know."

"I repeat to you, I know nothing," replied the priest firmly. "I know absolutely nothing."

They crossed the garden without another word. When they got to the door of the manse the priest stopped.

"I am going to 'd'Albrays' to-morrow. Have you no message for Mademoiselle de Trémeillan?"

The words were said in such a sweet and gentle way, they showed so much concern on the Vicar's part that Armand felt deeply affected by the delicate offer.

"How good you are, Monsieur le Curé," he said,

"and how well you understand me! Tell her, tell her that I adore her. Tell her that whatever happens she may trust in my love, in my devotion . . . tell her . . ."

"Gently, gently, my son," interrupted the priest, smiling, "remember there are certain things that a priest cannot say. But I'll do my best. Goodbye, goodbye, and God be with you."

On his road back to Mesnil, Armand felt that the visit had done him good. He stopped at least a score of times to look at the miniature given him by the vicar of Bonnières.

He understood by now the strange coldness of the Count towards Marguérite. It was evident that Monsieur de Trémeillan hated the poor child, and if up to this time he had made every effort to hide his real feelings, he would no longer disguise them under the present circumstances. Armand felt afraid to think of his dear Marguérite's sufferings in the prison where the Count held her shut up. He knew that they had everything to fear from the violence and anger of that pitiless old man.

And the anguish he suffered at the thought made him more determined than ever to put an end as quickly as possible to the strange situation fate had forced upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

ARMAND'S way back lay past "d'Albrays," and the thought struck him to go as far as the lodge, which was near the gates, and to question once more la Terreuse.

The woman, doubtless, knew all the particulars of the drama that had been enacted in the place twenty

years before, and in which she had certainly played an active part.

Truly, her savage disposition and the real or simulated state of her mind were likely to render all attempts at questioning her fruitless. Armand's experience in that respect of but a few days previously, inspired him with serious misgivings. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to try once more.

The tiny dwelling was absolutely closed on every side; but a thin thread of smoke from one of the chimneys showed that there was someone inside. Armand knocked at the door, but his summons remained unanswered.

Armand waited a few moments, and knocking once more, lifted the latch at the same time. The door swung back, and the young fellow entered the room which was almost dark, all the shutters being closed. The only light came from a pane of smoke-stained glass over the door.

When his eyes got accustomed to the darkness, he noticed a black, almost shapeless figure huddled up near the fireplace, in which two logs were smouldering away. He came to the conclusion that it was la Terreuse's.

He let a little more light into the room by opening the door. A sunbeam fell athwart the floor and cut the darkness with a golden ray, in which the grey motes bobbed up and down. The room itself was very poorly furnished. Over the mantelpiece was a large old-fashioned regulation rifle, a goatskin-knapsack, and a cockade, originally white, but now almost black with dust and grime.

"Will you shut the door, you tiresome imp?" growled Terreuse in her husky voice, and without looking up. She was under the impression that it was the young peasant lad whom she had taken to live with her to run her errands, and perhaps also to shield her from the terror which solitude and

the stay in that dwelling exercised on her troubled mind.

Armand advanced a few steps and planted himself in front of her with the light full upon him.

La Terreuse, with bent head and the hood of her cloak drawn almost over her eyes, was telling her beads on a coarse rosary she held between her bent and twisted fingers. She slowly raised her head, and gave Armand a sidelong glance.

"Oh, it's you again," she said gruffly. "What do you want with me?"

"The sun makes it very warm, and I have come to rest for a moment, that is, if you will allow me."

La Terreuse replied by a growl which did not seem very hospitable, and went on telling her beads, her palsied head bent down and almost touching her knees.

Armand took a chair. "You have got very comfortable quarters here," he began. "No wonder that you like Count de Trémeillan, who is taking such care of you in your old age," he added, drawing closer to la Terreuse.

"It is nearly four hundred years that we serve the Trémeillan family," said the old woman, in her gruff voice. "It is very natural that the Trémeillans should be kind to us."

"Of course. Still, if I had been you, I should have asked the Count to put me anywhere but here."

"Why so?"

"I told you why the other day. I should not care to live in a room where a crime had been committed. I say, people have seen her again," he added, bending mysteriously over the old woman.

"Who's been seen again?"

"The woman that was poisoned; Marianne I know two people in the neighbourhood who saw her. The first time she was seated near a stream and crying. The second time it was close upon twelve o'clock and on a moonlit night, out yonder, down

in the dell, near what they call the Cat's Hole. She was slowly walking along and seemed to be looking for something. She was ghastly pale."

Armand could not catch sight of la Terreuse's face, hidden as it was by the hood. But he was under the impression that her hands shook—at any rate, the beads rattled with a kind of sharp click.

"You may come upon her one of these days," he went on. "I suppose this is the bed in which she died," he said, pointing to the high bed, hung with curtains, which stood in a dark corner of the room. "If I were you I should not care to sleep in it."

"Why do you tell me all this?" inquired la Terreuse, whose voice had become very low and shaky.

"I only tell you this just for talking's sake. After all when a woman has been an honest woman all her life she is not afraid of the dead. I only wanted to ask you whether you, who are in the park the whole of the day and sometimes at night, have never met this ghost of which several people have told me?"

"I have never seen anything and I don't know what you are talking about." After this, Armand could not get another word out of the old woman. She had started telling her beads again, but in a kind of feverish, excited way. So he said good-bye and left the gamekeeper's lodge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Armand was gone la Terreuse sat for a long time near the fireplace motionless, her body almost bent double. But her mind was evidently busily at work, for she moaned and sighed and kept mumbling to herself words without any apparent

connection, telling her beads mechanically all the while. She sat for many hours like this. Towards four o'clock she went out as she was in the habit of doing every day to gather wood in the forest. When she came back at nightfall she had a heavy load of twigs and of fresh grass which she had cut for her goat. She flung the load into the small enclosure in front of the lodge, and shouted to the peasant lad to help her to carry it indoors. But the latter had evidently taken advantage of the old woman's absence to go bird-nesting, for no answer came.

She called again and again with the same result, and after growling at the young imp, she left the wood outside, and carried the grass to a tiny out-house where the goat was tethered. After this she slowly went up the steps leading to the front door. The day was waning fast, and the shutters being shut the room was very dark. Groping about the high mantelshelf she managed to find a candle stuck on a small iron peg and lighted it. The old woman seemed more agitated than usual. Armand's visit had no doubt produced a certain effect.

For, though endowed with extraordinary energy, she was, like most country people, given to superstitious fears. She believed in ghosts, in all the strange phantoms conjured up by popular credulity.

She kept shambling about the room, muttering between her teeth, and though the evening was very mild every now and again shivering from head to foot. Then she fetched a bundle of twigs, flung it on the fire and blew it with all her might. The moment the flame leaped bright and clear up the chimney she blew out the candle. The glare of the fire was sufficient for her. She was going to fetch the saucepan to hang on her pothook, when passing before the bedstead she stopped all of a sudden and began to tremble violently. She fancied she had seen the closely-drawn green serge curtains move.

La Terreuse drew herself up, and the movement

caused the black hood to drop on her shoulders and to show the weird head with the unkempt, touzled grey hair, that contrasted so strangely with the copper-coloured complexion and the gleaming dark eyes.

These eyes, dilated with terror, were now fixed on the bed. She drew back slowly towards the adjoining room, but without taking her eyes off the spot which seemed to have a terrible fascination for her. She was just about to open the door, when she fancied she heard a low sigh. The sigh, the moan, still came from the same dark corner where stood the bedstead.

Then la Terreuse came back. She walked cautiously, her hands in front of her, her eyes almost starting from their sockets with the dread that had gradually taken possession of her.

When she was but a few steps away from the couch she stopped and seemed to hesitate. At the same time she was determined to put an end to the anguish that choked her, so she rushed forward and with a violent, desperate movement flung back the curtains.

At the same moment she uttered a hoarse yell, and fell backward like a log on the large oaken table that stood in the middle of the room.

Between the curtains, the stiff folds of which reached to the ground, appeared a head, pale with grief and suffering.

It was Marianne Torquenié's.

She was seated on the edge of the bed, her arms folded across her breast, wearing the same dress she wore a few days before her death.

A deep silence had fallen upon the room, broken only by the suppressed rattle in the throat of the old woman, who was gasping with terror and who put one arm across her eyes to shut out the horrible vision.

The apparition got into an upright position, but so

lightly that no sound was heard when its feet touched the ground. For some time it stood confronting la Terreuse, staring at her with a relentless look.

"Do you know me?" it said at last in a slow whisper. And seeing that the terror-stricken old woman did not answer, it went on, "It is you who killed me, and it will not be long before you will stand before the Almighty. But before leaving this world you will have to confess your crime. An innocent man was convicted in your stead, and he will have to be avenged. If you do not confess, I will haunt you day and night, my pale face that frightens you will be near you every minute. Send for the magistrates to-morrow, in this very place and tell them all that happened twenty years ago. If you try to hide a single thing, if you endeavour to tell a single lie, I will come back! Do you hear—I will come back!"

Marianne Torquenié uttered these words in a threatening voice, her teeth tightly set, and darting a fiery look at la Terreuse as she drew closer to her still. The latter, beside herself with fear, uttered a stifled yell, and sank to the ground.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ABOUT two o'clock next day a carriage was rapidly trundling on the high road in the direction of "d'Albrays." It contained three persons, two magistrates from the Rennes Court and Armand d'Arcay.

Early in the morning the little peasant lad who lived with la Terreuse had called at Mesnil and asked to see Armand. The urchin told him that the old woman seemed "off her head." She had

refused to spend the night indoors, and had gone to lie down in the outhouse. At her age it was enough to kill her, and he (the lad) was under the impression that she was not long for this world. She did not speak, and sat huddled up in a corner in the garden. She refused to go inside the house. The poor child looked frightened at la Terreuse's extraordinary behaviour.

"At last this morning she told me to go to you. 'Go to the lawyer at Mesnil,' she said, 'and tell him to bring the magistrates. I want to speak to them.' And here I am," he added, "but I think she wants a doctor more than anything else."

After hearing all he had to say, Armand gave the urchin a piece of silver, and sent him back to la Terreuse. "You will tell her that I will come to-day and bring two magistrates with me."

He had the trap brought round in a great hurry, and started for Rennes at a gallop. When there, he went to see two of his friends, to whose discretion he could trust. He told them the whole of the mysterious affair, and the means whereby he was going to wring from la Terreuse a confession of the part she herself had played in that crime of the past. He added that up till now the means had succeeded beyond his hopes, and that la Terreuse seemed disposed to make a clean breast of it, deceived as she was by the likeness of Jeanne Torquenié to her mother, and frightened at the sudden apparition of the woman she had poisoned twenty years ago. But no time was to be lost in noting down her confession, so they decided to go there and then.

Moreover, during the journey Armand gave the examining magistrate and the advocate-general who accompanied him all the particulars that might prove useful in the task before them.

The latter felt deeply interested in the narrative of this strange affair. They told Armand that he might depend upon their energy and discretion,

and that they would do their utmost to effect the reinstatement of Jean Torquenié in the eyes of law without entailing too painful consequences. They also complimented him upon what he had done, and on his strength of character under circumstances so harrowing to himself.

The carriage stopped within about fifty yards of the gamekeeper's lodge. They alighted and walked the rest of the way. The peasant lad, who had been on the look out for them, took them inside the house. The old woman was not in the room where she was in the habit of sitting, and where the night before she had been confronted with the terrible spectre of her victim. She had taken refuge in a dark and narrow closet adjoining the kitchen.

Armand asked his friends to wait a few minutes in the front room, and went to fetch the old woman. But he was almost obliged to use violence in order to make her leave her hiding-place. At last he succeeded in bringing her inside, holding her by the wrist, and forced her, as it were, on a wooden stool near the fireplace. She seemed utterly crushed, her hood was over her head, as usual, and she sat bent double, and shaking in all her limbs.

"You sent for us," said Armand, in a curt voice. "What do you want with us?"

She did not answer, and the young barrister was obliged to repeat his question.

"I want nothing, and I have nothing to say to you," at last growled la Terreuse.

"Yet you seemed in a great hurry to see us?"

"I want first of all to speak to the master."

"What master?"

"The Count—Count Henri."

"That's impossible." Then, as if suddenly inspired, he added: "That's impossible, for you will never see Count de Trémeillan again." He waited a little while. "Monsieur de Trémeillan died last night," he said slowly.

The old woman shuddered, and raised her white head. "Dead?" she yelled.

"He is dead."

"Has he seen her also, perhaps?" she mumbled, shivering with fear.

"Consider well," added Armand. "We complied with your request to come here to-day. If you refuse to speak we'll go at once and we'll not come back again."

"I have nothing to say," growled la Terreuse.

Armand made a sign to the two magistrates that accompanied him. They all three got up and went towards the door. They had already reached the threshold when la Terreuse, who seemed terribly excited, exclaimed:

"One moment, gentlemen; one moment, I beg of you."

They stood still.

"Now, gentlemen," she said, casting a timid and furtive glance at them, "you wouldn't abandon a poor old woman like this. My head is not very strong, and what you have just told me . . . Dead, he is dead . . . he was as firm and as strong as one of our oaks in the park. He died last night. She must have cast a spell on him. Ah," she gasped all at once after a long silence; "it is choking me, I can't hold out any longer. I am choking, and I'll tell you all about it. But you will not do him any harm, seeing that he is dead; will you?"

She dropped her head in her black and rather red hands and seemed to think the matter over for several moments, while Armand and the magistrates resumed their seats. Monsieur Jousserin took out his pocket-book ready to write down his notes.

"If anyone had told me I should not carry this secret to the grave with me I should not have believed him," said la Terreuse, staring at the logs smouldering away on the hearth. "To think that I am bound to speak, after having kept it to myself

for twenty years—after having hidden it from all the world. Yes, I am bound to speak ; if I don't ”

And again she shook with fear as she cast a wild look in the direction of the bed.

“After all,” she went on, shaking her grizzled head, “it will relieve me. Every now and then it chokes me. Dead ! . . he is dead ! Gentlemen,” she said, drawing her stool closer to the three men and speaking in a scarcely audible voice ; “gentlemen, it is I who killed Viscount de Mortrée it is I who poisoned Marianne.”

And impelled partly by her own wish to be relieved of her secret, partly under the pressure of Armand's questions, she told the dramatic events that had occurred twenty years before.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LA TERREUSE in those days lived in a kind of tumble-down shanty in the middle of the park, which had formerly been a meeting-place for Count de Trémeillon's shooting parties. In fact Count de Trémeillon, who had never forgotten the services the woman rendered him during his adventurous expedition in La Vendée, had never been able to induce her to take up her quarters in the house itself. She preferred the independence of this somewhat savage existence.

Count de Trémeillon often stopped at the hut for a little while on his way homeward from his day's sport. La Terreuse was one of the few human beings for whom he felt some sympathy. Her blind devotion, the attachment, savouring of the fanatical and sublime, had perhaps touched his heart, because it reminded him of the exaggerated

respect of servants of yore for their masters. The woman was, as it were, a connecting link with the past which he admired and regretted.

One afternoon he entered the hut as he was in the habit of doing from time to time, and asked her for a glass of cider. This was in the month of April.

La Terreuse seemed in no hurry to attend to him, but stood stockstill staring at him with all her might. Seeing which, he became impatient, "Did you hear me?" he snapped; "and are you going to give me something to drink?"

She kept dodging about the room, pretending to look for a glass, then she went to a cupboard, and at last, as if prompted by a sudden resolution, she came back to the Count and said abruptly, "Master, you must not go out shooting any more?"

"And why?" asked the Count, frowning.

"You must not leave the house. For while you are out enemies may slip in."

"What do you mean? Speak out," said the Count, impatiently. "To what enemies are you alluding?"

"I am alluding to a man who is after your belongings."

"My belongings?"

"I am alluding to young de Mortrée."

"Look here, are you bent upon trying my temper?" yelled the Count, who had turned pale at the sound of the name he detested. "You have always had that mania of trying to puzzle people. It is all very well with your peasant folk to whom you are telling their good fortune. But with me you must speak out."

"Poor people are often punished when they tell the truth to their master. Still, it is best you should know all." Then coming closer to the Count, she went on in a low voice: "Young Viscount de Mortrée and the Countess meet nearly every day. Sometimes it is at Marianne's—I mean Torquenié's

wife, at others it is in the park. They also write to one another. Marianne takes the letters to 'Les Marnes,' like this, in her apron."

The Count took up a chair with both hands and dashed it to the ground with such violence that it broke to pieces. At the same time he uttered a yell like that of a wild beast, and rushed to the door.

La Terreuse flung herself in front of him and stopped him on the threshold. "One moment," she said, with a murderous look in her eyes, "you want to kill him?"

"I want to kill them both," he hissed, gripping la Terreuse's shoulder as in a vice to get her out of his way.

"You have the right to do so," she said; "but take care, master, not to put yourself in the wrong. You must take them unawares . . . and then, I'll do the rest. You know that out yonder I wasn't afraid of bringing my man down. You must not soil your hands. Leave it to me; I have got a little plan of my own that will keep the law out of your affairs. But you must pretend to know nothing until I tell you. In order to trap the bird you must not show it the trap. I have been thinking over all this since I saw them sitting chatting one evening on one of the seats in the park. Master, just allow your faithful Jouannette to give you some advice. Do not go back to the house, you would do something terrible. Stop here, and send word to the Countess that you are gone to the Marquis de Rieuset or to Messieurs d'Argis, it does not matter which. She will think herself free and take advantage of it. You will take this poor bed, it is very wretched, but I can only offer you what I have got. I will go to the park. I know the way he comes, and I will watch for him day and night. I will come and tell you at the right moment."

Count de Trémeillon did not fall in with the plan proposed by la Terreuse without a great deal of

opposition. His violent character prompted him to make an example there and then. Still, la Terreuse persuaded him to be patient, for at least a few hours. During the evening, when he had retired to a corner of the room, sombre and taciturn, arranging his scheme of revenge, the woman at last unfolded the diabolical project she had contrived to kill Viscount de Mortrée, without running any risk. She furthermore told him the tales bruited about in the neighbourhood. People would have it that the Viscount was carrying on an intrigue with Marianne Torquenié. They might take advantage of these rumours, and if the murder was discovered lead justice on a wrong track.

Count de Trémeillon listened without saying a word. He strode up and down the room, clanking his hobnailed shooting boots on the hard mud floor. But he uttered no protest at la Terreuse's infamous proposals; the idea of casting a slur upon the reputation of an honest woman, of having an innocent man convicted in his stead, elicited no cry of indignation on his part.

The first and foremost consideration to him was to hide the disgrace that had been cast on his name. The insult had to be avenged, but it had to be done with assured impunity, and to gain this end any and every means would be welcome.

"You are a good creature," he said to la Terreuse when she had ceased speaking. "You are right, I will remain here. You shall light me a fire; I will pass the night in this armchair, and make up my mind as to what to do."

La Terreuse went to another corner of the room, and came back with a bundle of clothing, which she opened, and took from it a short carabine. "This carabine belongs to *him*," she said, dropping her voice. "I took it from *his* place. When we have done with it we will put it back again."

At the same time a terrible smile rose to her lips.

Count de Trémeillan stopped for two days at la Terreuse's. Everyone in the house thought he was away. While he was hiding at his accomplice's the latter spent her days and nights outside watching, spying, carefully observing everything that went on between "Les Marnes" and "d'Albrays." She had resumed her savage ways; she was like a she-wolf in search of food. She only came at long intervals to the hut, saying a few hurried words to the Count, flinging a hunk of bread and a flask of brandy into her wallet, then departed, hugging the brushwood, wrapt in her big, black cloak.

One night the Count, who had dozed off by the fireplace, was awakened by two loud knocks on the door. When he opened it la Terreuse bounded so violently into the room as to almost upset him. She seemed out of breath; still she was able to gasp: "Quick! be quick."

"What is it?" asked the Count; but without answering la Terreuse went to the corner of the room, took the carabine from the bundle of clothes, loaded it quickly and shouldered it. Then she rushed out of the hut making a sign for the Count to follow her.

She walked so quickly that the Count had great difficulty in keeping up with her. In spite of the dark night she cut her way across the wood with wonderful surety, until at last they got to the house, where la Terreuse made her master go down into the dry moat that ran round the building. They both crouched down and watched as the sportsman watches for game. The deep silence was unbroken save for the heavy breathing of la Terreuse, who seemed thoroughly done up.

After a few moments when she had somewhat recovered, she said to her companion, "I have run all the way from the Alannes crossings" (it was close to "Les Marnes"). "I saw Viscount Marcellin on foot and wrapped in a large cloak which covered him

from head to foot. He looked as if he were coming this way. You don't know that I saw him come out of this door the other night," and she pointed to a small, low door on the other side of the moat.

"And to think that you did not kill him on the spot," howled the Count. "Under my own roof he darkens my door. . . . Oh, the pair of degraded wretches." Then the howl dropped into a kind of sombre, savage, bloodthirsty hiss. "You shall give me your carabine by and by, Jouannette," he said.

But la Terreuse shook her head. "I told you that you ought not to soil your hands, master," she replied doggedly. "Leave it to me."

Then for a good while they crouched silently by one another's side, the Count drawing every now and then long, deep sighs, which were more like the low growls of the brute in the jungle. In fact, every minute seemed an age to him. If Viscount de Mortrée had appeared on the spot, not a hundred Terreuses would have prevented him from flinging himself upon the young fellow and strangling him with his own hands. And such a revenge would have shown more courage, would have been less blamable, than the odious trap planned by la Terreuse and basely acquiesced in by the Count.

An hour went by, during which la Terreuse seemed terribly and strangely agitated. She kept mumbling and growling inarticulate sentences.

"You must have made a mistake," at last said the Count, impatiently. "It was not he."

"It was he right enough; I recognised him because he is a little bit lame," replied la Terreuse.

"Then he did not come in this direction, perhaps?"

"Yes, he did. He took the chestnut avenue. I was obliged to leave him to come and tell you. But I feel certain he was coming this way."

"Perhaps they arranged to meet in the park."

"It is too cold. No, I am sure they did not. Besides, they saw one another yesterday inside the house; they naturally thought they would recommence to-night. They are under the impression that you are miles and miles away."

The Count with difficulty suppressed a yell. "Hold your tongue, you wretch. Do you not see that you are torturing me," he moaned.

"You should not be afraid of hearing the truth," clenched la Terreuse energetically. "Look things in the face." Then, after a moment's silence, "I am of opinion that they are inside the house to night. But which way did he get in? He would not have dared to come by the front entrance. Last night he went out by the other one. Look here, master, I am only an old idiot, for I did not keep watch properly."

Saying which she waved her hand in despair and abruptly rose to her feet.

"Whither are you going?" asked the Count, who in spite of himself, yielded to the influence of this strange creature.

But la Terreuse seemed to have changed her mind for she crouched down once more and half-cocked her carabine.

"No," she said, "it isn't worth while. He is surely inside." Then she seemed to reflect for a few moments and the upshot came in the guise of a question asked in a low voice, "Master, you have the key of the front door?"

"Yes."

"Well, go inside and straight to the Countess's room. If he is with her he will try to get away, and I will watch here for the game you have startled."

The Count jumped up quickly. The advice tallied too much with his violent instincts for him not to follow it.

"You are right," he said, and moved a few steps

"Above all, do not touch either one or the other,"

insisted la Terreuse, still retaining him. "If I was foolish enough to let him go in, I swear to you that I will not let him leave the house alive."

"But if you should miss him?"

La Terreuse leant forward and said in a sinister tone:

"I swear by God's holy name that in four and twenty hours he will be a corpse."

The Count went away with a firm step in the direction of the front entrance.

Ten minutes elapsed but in spite of her careful watch she could not see a living being. She fully expected to see Viscount Marcellin issue from the small door. Her mind was made up. She meant to dog his footsteps, and to kill him when he was outside the confines of the park.

Her sole fear was that Count de Trémeillan would be unable to contain himself on surprising his wife with Monsieur de Mortrée, and that he might kill both there and then. From sheer anxiety her breath became thick and short. She strained her ears, but could hear nothing of what was going inside the house. A deep silence hung over everything around her.

It was getting daylight, consequently between three and four o'clock.

All of a sudden her ear seemed to catch the sound of a pane of glass being broken. But it was on the other side of the house and the sound seemed to proceed from the upper stories.

She ran along the moat, which, as we have already said, surrounded the house, and in a few moments reached the opposite wing. With one single glance she examined the front of the house. It was still very dark; nevertheless, she fancied she could see a black indistinct figure slide down the angle made by a high turret. "It must be he," she thought, and then like the trapper who at last sees the long expected quarry within his reach, she could not help

starting with a cruel movement of joy. She carefully looked to the cap of her carabine.

The man came down as quickly as he could along the chain of the lightning conductor. It looked as if, surprised by the Count, he had fled across the house, and made for the upper stories. He had smashed one of the windows of the attics, got out upon the roof and was now making a most perilous descent.

La Terreuse watched every movement with rapt attention. She felt intensely moved, and afraid lest his strength should fail him and he should leave go hold of the chain of the lightning conductor. For if he fell down and maimed or killed himself the scandal could no longer be hushed up and the Count would be disgraced.

But there was an end at last of this selfish anxiety, for the Viscount de Mortrée managed to get to the bottom of the moat in safety. He peered uneasily around, then clambered up the embankment and took to his heels, his body bent double almost so as to escape observation. La Terreuse was after him immediately and it was getting broad daylight. At any rate it was already light enough to be able to distinguish things, and this semi-obscurity was, if anything, in favour of la Terreuse, for it enabled her to follow her victim unperceived.

The latter was very nimble, and made good headway. When he reached the park he stopped of a sudden and wheeled round to see if he was being tracked. La Terreuse failed to get behind a tree in time and the Viscount caught sight of her. For a moment or so he seemed undecided what to do. But he had no weapon upon him and could therefore not engage upon a struggle with the individual who appeared to be in pursuit. He would have incurred the risk of being recognised and of irrevocably ruining the unhappy woman who had given herself to him.

Monsieur de Trémeillan had not seen him. Viscount Marcellin had fled the moment the Count entered the ground-floor rooms of the house. Marianne Torquenié, who kept strict watch, had warned them in time. Hence he was justified in believing that the husband was still ignorant of everything, and that the shadow that dogged his footsteps was that of a servant who mistook him for a burglar or a thief.

Consequently, he resumed his course, which had been interrupted for a moment. Every now and then he looked round, and noticed the vague, indistinct, black form behind him. The distance between them remained about the same.

Then he flung himself into the thickest part of the wood his face and hands bleeding, lacerated, as they were by the brambles and thorns he tried to brush aside and to crush in his mad course. For a moment he was under the impression of having given his pursuer the slip. He had come to a rather large clearing, and heard no sound around him. Like the stag that has succeeded in throwing the hounds off the scent, he stood still, drew a deep breath and looked up to reconnoitre. But the respite was a short one, the sound of snapped twigs behind him made him shudder, for it came closer and closer. In another moment he saw the tops of the saplings sway to and fro. There was no doubt about it, his pursuer was on his track again, so he rushed into the wood once more and kept straight before him. He made not the least attempt to trace his way, but trusted wholly to chance. Being young and very strong, he hoped to tire out the unknown enemy who pursued so relentlessly. He made sure that the latter was unarmed, for if not, what would have prevented him from firing by now. But la Terreuse was determined not to kill her man on Monsieur de Trémeillan's grounds, that was why she had not made use as yet of her

carabine. Viscount Marcellin came to the conclusion that it was only a trial of endurance and agility between him and the unknown pursuer, and felt not the least anxiety on that point. So, instead of making once more for the thick of the wood, and exhausting his strength in a toilsome course across the dense vegetation and interwoven branches, he took the first path before him, and turning neither to the right nor to the left ran as fast as he could. The path led to one of those straight long glades with stunted grass under foot, and a dome of foliage overhead, which regularly intersect the densely-wooded estates in those parts. He went on and on until he came to a kind of crossways, in the centre of which stood a grey, mouldy finger-post, the boards of which had disappeared years before.

He made for what he believed to be the way to the road to Laval and to "Les Marnes"; and at last after three-quarters of an hour of mad gallop he emerged from the wood into a road between two embankments, and lined with hedges. Beyond this lay the fields, intersected with ditches and raised embankments, after the Breton fashion.

He was under the impression that from the moment he had emerged from the wood his pursuer had lost ground. Another spurt and he would be beyond his reach.

Though utterly spent and panting for breath he did not stop for a single instant, but pursued his course. But about a hundred yards further on he was compelled to come to a standstill. The road was absolutely blocked by a mountain of newly-cut trees thrown right across.

He had to retrace his steps along the ditches, to fly across the open fields. He had left the Trémeillan estate, and this was the very moment la Terreuse had fixed upon for the execution of her diabolical plan. She probably knew that the road between the two embankments was barred, for instead of follow-

ing him, she cut across a narrow path that led to a thickly wooded coppice, and disappeared in it.

Her strength was also giving way ; she felt as if her head was splitting, her eyes were starting from their sockets, her breath came thick and fast.

But she was not going to relinquish her prey. Had Viscount Marcellin been a hundred times as strong and as active she would still have followed him, and only given in when dropping dead with fatigue.

When she got fairly into the coppice, which stood on the borders of those wooded moors designated in those parts by the name of *Le Bocage*, she flung herself down, and, supporting herself on both hands, craned forward to watch for the reappearance of Viscount de Mortrée.

She herself was so utterly exhausted that at each breath she took she uttered a painful moan which seemed to tear her chest to pieces.

Facing her lay a vast tract of freshly-ploughed land, hedged in on all sides. She knew the country well and was aware that Viscount Marcellin, finding the road barred to him, would have to come that way.

She had not many seconds to wait. All at once a dark head peered from the matted brambles. The poor gentleman's face was haggard with anguish and fatigue. He left his stooping position when he got on to the embankment, carefully looked around him in every direction, and finally set off at a run across the ploughed field.

He seemed utterly done up ; his strength was apparently gone, for his pace was much slower than before. He was hoping perhaps that he had thrown his pursuer off the scent, at any rate he ran less quickly. He had reached the end of the field, and left one of his shoes behind him in the heavy soil ; he was just going to scale the hedge in front of him

when a shot rang upon the air. Without uttering a cry he dropped head foremost into the ditch at the foot of the embankment.

In a few seconds, la Terreuse, who had recovered all her energy, ran across the short space between her hiding-place and the spot where Viscount de Mortrée had gone down. She had seen him disappear, still she might have missed him; he might only be wounded. When she got to the ditch she bent forward. The body lay in front of her, motionless, the blood trickling down the forehead.

A horrible smile, showing the gleaming white teeth, lighted up the woman's face. She cautiously swept the horizon in every direction, then craned her neck towards the high road, and listened intently. Not a living soul was nigh.

After this she softly stepped down the embankment, looked at her victim for an instant, and placed her hand on his heart. Marcellin de Mortrée had ceased to live.

Slinging her carabine across her shoulder, she clambered up the embankment, crossed the field once more and disappeared among the hedges and ditches of Le Bocage. On that same day the Countess de Trémeillan left for the South.

A few weeks later Jean Torquenié was arrested. La Terreuse had not wasted her time; she had quickly spread the story of the intrigue between Marianne Torquenié and Viscount Marcellin de Mortrée.

Poor Marianne was not in a position to deny the story. The unexpected appearance of Count de Trémeillan and the subsequent terrible scene had driven her frantic with fear and trembling; she was stricken down with a violent fever and had been delirious nearly the whole of the time. She had remained utterly unconscious of the events that eventually led to the arrest of her husband.

La Terreuse had taken up her quarters in the lodge, ostensibly to look after her, in reality to carefully to watch events in the game-keeper's lodge and to insure the success of the infamous plot she had concocted. Taking advantage of the absence of Jean Torquenié, of his wife's illness, she had restored the powder-stained carabine to the place whence she had taken it to kill Viscount de Mortrée. .

The terrible event had left Count de Trémeillan a prey to the most intense melancholy. He no longer stirred from the large room on the ground floor, where he had taken up his quarters, and whither his bed had been taken.

La Terreuse came to see him from time to time, but he barely opened his lips to her. The sight of the woman seemed to inspire him with profound disgust.

As for the latter, she appeared not to have abated one jot of her savage energy ; her active devotion in his behalf never failed for a single moment. She appeared to take no notice of her master's curt answers nor of his fits of temper.

When he was more than usually sombre or irritable, she told him not to be uneasy. "Everything is going all right, master," she said. And then she gave him an account of her ruses to throw the authorities off the scent, to divert the suspicion of the murder, perpetrated in obedience to the Count's behest, to some one else.

One evening, however, when coming to see him, she seemed more agitated than usual. She looked uncomfortable, and her glibness of tongue was at fault,

"What is the matter with you?" asked the Count, with a frown that betokened fear as much as anger. "Is there anything new?"

"Yes, there's something new," said la Terreuse averting her head. "Marianne Torquenié is dead."

The Count drew a long breath of relief. He

expected something more terrible as far as he was personally concerned.

But reassured on that score he began to reflect upon what la Terreuse had just told him, and called to mind her evident hesitation, the troubled look that preceded the communication of the news.

"You did not kill her, I trust?" he said, looking her straight in her eyes.

"If she had not died, she might have blabbed, and we should have been undone," said la Terreuse in a sombre tone.

The Count turned livid, and stared around him terror-stricken. But not a word of blame passed his lips. He understood that this murder was necessary, and in spite of the horror he felt he did not dare vent his indignation on la Terreuse. He felt that she but spoke the truth. The death of Marianne Torquenié, of the only witness who was acquainted with the particulars of the drama that had been enacted at "d'Albrays," during that terrible April night—the death of Marianne Torquenié insured his complete impunity, and cast a veil over the disgrace of the Countess.

The trial took place, and Jean Torquenié owing to the crushing evidence of the witnesses, above all to that of la Terreuse, was convicted and sentenced, without Count de Trémeillan lifting a finger to prevent this infamous thing. True, he had the questionable courage to appear in court in order to give Jean Torquenié a kind of stereotyped character, by declaring that the gamekeeper had always been an honest and faithful servant. He probably thought that after this he was quits with the unfortunate man whom he had sent to a convict prison.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It took a long while to drag all this from la Terreuse, but her statement was completed at last, and she consented to sign the report of it. After that her strength gave way altogether, and she sank back in a chair, utterly undone, huddled together, as if an iron hand had suddenly crushed her with its weight.

"Our business is at an end here, gentlemen," said Armand, rising, "so we may just as well go."

In the garden they came upon the peasant lad who lived with la Terreuse.

"Run to Monsieur Dubois, the Vicar of Bonnières, at once," said Armand to the boy, putting a piece of silver in his hand. "Tell him to come directly to confess a dying woman." And he pointed to the room where la Terreuse was sitting.

The boy looked terribly frightened. He cast a terror-stricken glance in the direction of the lodge, then took off his clogs, and started off at a gallop towards Bonnières.

On their way back Armand and his two companions discussed the important statement of which they had become the depositaries. It was then only that Armand fully grasped the meaning of Vicar Dubois' words on the occasion of his last visit to him. "You should not be too hard on him," the priest had said in speaking of Monsieur de Trémeillan. "Perhaps he is less guilty than you suspect."

And, in fact, Count de Trémeillan had not been the direct author of the crimes. His only fault—a fault still sufficiently grave and crushing—had been to let la Terreuse accomplish her diabolical plot and not to denounce her further crimes in order to

shield himself from the consequences of Viscount de Mortrée's murder.

"This wretched woman is probably not long for this world," remarked the examining magistrate. "Should she die there might be a means of arranging matters so as to avoid all scandal."

The two magistrates returned to Rennes and Armand took a bridle path leading to Mesnil.

Before leaving his friends Armand had impressed upon them once more the necessity of the strictest secrecy and appointed to meet them next day in order to concert plans for taking decisive action.

He reached Mesnil in time for dinner, and could not help uttering a cry of surprise as he entered the room. Marguérite de Trémeillan was seated at table by the side of his mother. For a moment he stood motionless, utterly taken aback. He did not know whether he was awake or dreaming. Madame d'Arcay explained the situation in a few words. "Fancy my meeting with the dear child just as I was going out about two hours ago," she said to Armand. "She was coming to see me, so I brought her back to dine with us. Virginie shall take her home to-night. I gave her a good talking to for having been so long without coming to see her mother that is to be."

While dear Madame d'Arcay was meandering on, Armand looked attentively at Marguérite's wan face. He noticed her red eyelids, the forced smile that played on her colourless lips. He read the intense anguish of the poor girl in the fixed stare she gave him. The situation was indeed a strange one, and rendered more harrowing by the prosaic complexion put upon it by a third party.

For with the exquisite tact possessed by most women, Marguérite had fully grasped the fact at once that Madame d'Arcay had not the remotest suspicion of the drama that was being enacted under her very eyes,

Marguérite had accepted Madame d'Arcay's invitation because she wished to see Armand. It was her ardent longing to speak to him, to hear from his own lips the state of affairs that had made her break through the confinement imposed by the harsh will of Count de Trémeillan.

And for the next two hours, with her brain throbbing and burning, with her heart knocking against her ribs each time she saw a shadow in the garden or heard the clanging of the bell at the gate, she had been compelled to listen and reply to the affectionate commonplaces of the kind-hearted matron, who already looked upon her as her daughter, who kept talking of dresses and wedding outfits, of domestic arrangements, while she sat with sinking heart and feeling that the frail fabric of her happiness was giving way on all sides.

The dinner was a downright martyrdom to the young people. They felt compelled to dissemble, to smile, to talk small talk, to look happy and cheerful, in short, to hide the anxiety that was gnawing their heartstrings.

Armand failed to explain to himself the unexpected arrival of Marguérite. By what means had she recovered her liberty? Or had Count de Trémeillan relented at last? Was she a messenger of comfort, or was she come to fling herself into his arms that he might shield her from the torture inflicted upon her.

He guessed well enough that his mother's meeting with Marguérite was due to an unfortunate accident. Mademoiselle de Trémeillan was on her way to see him, as she had come to see him once before at Rennes.

She only hoped to see him and no one but him; she wanted to speak to him by himself. But, becoming aware of Madame d'Arcay's absolute ignorance of what was going on, she had been unable to refuse the latter's invitation to return with her to Mesnil.

She had even deluded the old lady into the belief that the visit was meant for her.

Several hours had gone by, and it was her unabated, ardent desire to see Armand that had made her accept the pressing invitation to stay to dinner of her intended mother-in-law.

He came at last, she was near him, and still they could not talk unrestrictedly and ask one another the questions that racked their hearts, that rose burning to their lips.

The agony lasted for one long, weary hour. Whether Madame d'Arcay at last noticed the embarrassment of the young people or not was never known, but under the pretext of having to give some instructions to the servants, she rose when the dessert was on the table and left them to themselves.

The moment the door closed behind her, Marguérite started from her chair and cast a desperate glance at Armand. "Take me into the garden," she gasped. "Be quick! be quick or I shall choke."

A few moments later they were seated side by side in a small arbour of honeysuckle at the angle of a dense bower which completely hid them from everyone.

"Do not ask me how I came here," said Marguérite in a low and quick tone. "I am quaking with fear. I fancy at every moment that he is coming to look for me, that he will drag me away by force and put me back into the room which he has converted into a prison cell for me. I am dying with agony. I am left without news, and I have come to ask you for it. What has happened? What is going to happen? What are you doing? Is there any hope of this horrible martyrdom coming to an end soon?"

"Yes, it will be over very soon. Courage, my dear Marguérite," said Armand, clasping both her hands. "How will it end? I am unable to tell you. But I swear to you, my darling, that my love

for you will make up one day for what you have suffered during this horrible period of suspense."

A wan smile played on Marguérite's white lips, while she feebly returned the pressure of Armand's hands. "Courage," she repeated in a firmer voice. "My courage will not fail me. But the time is precious, so let us be quick. I have been able to elude the vigilance of those whom my father told off to watch me, but they may perceive my absence at any moment. Do you know, Armand, what my father said to me yesterday? He declared to me that if I attempted to see you, he would take me away from France, to Italy, to Austria, and that he would have me shut up in a convent."

In as few words as possible Armand told the young girl what had happened since they had last met. He also told her how he had managed to wring the confession from la Terreuse.

"Then it is really true, after all," sighed Marguérite, for up to the last moment the poor child had fostered the hope that the drama with which she was closely bound up might be only a horrible dream, and it wanted the formal confessions of la Terreuse to convince her of the reality of her misfortune. "And now," she concluded with a look full of anguish, "what are you going to do?"

"I will go to your father the first thing in the morning, and tell him that the authorities know everything, that they have got the written statement of la Terreuse. He must take a decision one way or the other. I am still hoping that, driven back as he is into his last retrenchments, seeing as he must do that the confession of his accomplice deprives him of his last chance, he will consent to go, to leave France. Then, when the trial takes place, it will be conducted carefully and discreetly; la Terreuse will be convicted, for she is charged with the brunt of the crimes. I am almost certain that the law will be lenient with regard to your father."

"If he leaves France he will take me with him, and I shall be lost to you," exclaimed Marguérite in a tone of despair. "What a terrible position you have placed us in. What are we to do or to decide? Wherever I look I only see a series of insuperable obstacles. Armand," she went on with great warmth, "you know that everything is lost; you do not tell me the truth; you know that I can never be your wife; but you are trying to hoodwink me so that I may leave you to pursue to the bitter end the horrible duty you have set yourself."

"Marguérite, do you care for me?" asked Armand, drawing close to the young girl, and taking the delicately shaped head between his feverish palms.

"Great heavens! and he asks if I care for him," she replied in a deeply fervent tone. "In spite of all I am suffering through you, I have never ceased to love you for a single instant."

"And I worship you with all my soul—yes, I idolize you, my beloved, my wife," said Armand, laying the splendid dark head of the young girl on his shoulder. "We will succeed in removing all those obstacles. You shall be mine, and we will be happy still. You say the Count de Trémeillan will take you away? What does it matter? I will find you wherever you go. Heaven be praised, the days are gone by when they could imprison young girls against their will behind the bars of a convent. I know you to be so brave, so strong that I have not the least doubt with regard to you; and I beseech you to have the same faith in me."

"Hush, listen!" said Marguérite, lifting her head and listening intently. She fancied she had heard the sound of footsteps. She was under the impression that her father was coming after her. Armand noticed that all of a sudden she had turned pale. Marguérite was not mistaken. By the last faint rays of the sinking sun the two young people suddenly saw a huge shadow close to them.

Marguérite checked a cry of terror, while Armand started to his feet to protect her.

"I am sorry to interrupt you," said a sad voice, which the young man immediately recognised. "I was close to you and have heard everything."

"It is Jean Torquenié," whispered Armand to Marguérite. "Don't be afraid."

"Monsieur d'Arcay, and you, Mademoiselle," the erstwhile convict went on, "I can understand your cursing the wretched man who stands between you and your happiness. I am the cause of all your suffering. Why, great Heaven, should the innocent have to pay in this way for the guilty? . . . If it were not for my daughter——"

He stopped all at once and gulped down a sob. "Mademoiselle, when just now I heard you pity your own hard fate, I could not help crying myself. But I, also, have a daughter, and you will understand that I do not wish her to look upon me for ever as a convict whom everyone has the right to spurn, to despise. I give you my word that if I stood alone in the world, I should show myself as generous as you, Monsieur Armand. I would disappear, and no one would ever hear of me again."

"You must be reinstated in public opinion, Torquenié," said Armand in a firm voice; "and even if you stood alone in the world, you ought not to relinquish your right to fling its justice in the face of society which has condemned you."

"Ah, Monsieur, how good and kind you are, and what a lesson of courage you are teaching me," said Torquenié in a tone of admiration and gratitude. "What can I do to repay you? Look here, I would willingly give up my life to you."

"My father—here comes my father, Armand," said all of a sudden Marguérite de Trémeillan, whose uneasy glances had been constantly scanning the dense clusters of foliage, gradually becoming more indistinct in the gathering shadows of night.

From the moment she had come to Mesnil she had had a foreboding that her father would suddenly come upon her. She expected every moment to see him stand in front of her, and a feeling of unutterable anguish almost choked her.

The foreboding was being realized. A man was quickly walking down one of the avenues, probably coming towards Torquenié, who had remained standing, and whom consequently he could see in the fast gathering semi-darkness of the garden.

Marguélite had not been slow to recognise Count de Trémeillan, but Armand's usual composure and presence of mind did not forsake him at the critical moment.

"Go, Marguélite," he exclaimed, hurriedly; "Torquenié will take you back to 'd'Albrays': I entrust her to you," he added, pushing the erstwhile convict towards the young girl. "If you are really devoted to us this is the moment to show it."

Jean Torquenié, supporting Marguélite, who was almost fainting with fright, immediately disappeared behind a large clump of trees.

Armand remained standing at the spot just vacated by Torquenié, and waited in a very determined attitude for Count de Trémeillan, who was quickly striding towards him.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHEN he got to within a few steps of where Armand stood, Count de Trémeillan stopped. "I wish to see Monsieur d'Arcay," he said in a voice which sounded even more abrupt than usual, seeing that his quick walk had evidently put him out of

breath. "Go and tell him at once that Monsieur de Trémeillan is waiting for him here," he added.

"I am ready to hear what you have got to say, Monsieur le Comte," said Armand, advancing a step towards him.

Monsieur de Trémeillan drew back in surprise. He was no doubt under the impression that he was speaking to one of the Mesnil servants; he certainly did not expect to find himself face to face with Armand. Nevertheless he remained perfectly self-possessed.

"I wish to speak to you, Monsieur," he said, "and I am glad to find you here. What I have to say is a matter between ourselves only."

"I am at your disposal, Monsieur," replied Armand, pointing to the seat just vacated by Marguélite.

"Monsieur," began the Count, "you no doubt guess what brings me here. I went to see the Abbé Dubois to-day. On my way back from Bonnières I called at the house of a woman you know, and I was told that you had just left in company with two magistrates. You are apparently decided," he went on after a short pause, "to carry this wretched business to the bitter end. You neither respect the dead nor those who from their position have a right to be considered. You are bent upon disgracing me, Monsieur."

"I am bent upon getting justice for those whom you have disgraced, Monsieur; that is all I am bent upon, Monsieur le Comte. But what is the use of harping upon this? You are aware that nothing will alter my resolution."

"I know it. I also know what you have done, and the means by which you have wrung those statements from that wretched woman. I admit your skill. You have succeeded in getting the better of a devotion of thirty years standing, in frightening an old woman on the brink of the grave,

and in inducing her to betray her master. You ought to feel proud of yourself."

"Your sneers will not have the slightest effect on me, Monsieur. The means to which I had recourse to accomplish my end are those that may be frankly acknowledged by any honest man. I have been fortunate enough to get your accomplice to speak before two magistrates, who have noted down the whole of her statement. I congratulate myself on this result, which is singularly calculated to bring this sad affair to a speedy end."

"Do not halloo before you are out of the wood, Monsieur," said Count de Trémeillan in a threatening tone. "You think you have me at your gun's muzzle like an old boar at bay. Take care. The shot you are about to fire may wound, nay kill, someone else."

Armand shuddered. He understood that the Count was alluding to Marguérite. But what was he driving at?

"Mademoiselle Trémeillan"—he began in a less determined tone.

"Mademoiselle Trémeillan is dying, Monsieur," said the Count with great stress. "She is dying, Monsieur, and if she succumbs to the grief that is consuming her, you may pride yourself upon having killed her."

Armand drew a deep sigh of relief. The Count was not aware of Marguérite's absence. He had no doubt been away from "d'Albrays" part of the day. It was evident that he was playing his last trump in trying to make the young fellow believe that the trial would aim a fatal blow at the woman he loved.

This clumsy and cruel ruse filled Armand with a feeling of revolt.

"You lie, Monsieur le Comte," he exclaimed fiercely. "There is not the least danger to Mademoiselle de Trémeillan's life. She is no doubt

painfully affected by the situation that has made you and me mortal enemies. But she knows that she may place faith in me; that I love her, and that, whatever happens, she will be my wife. You mean to frighten me, to make me relinquish the proceedings I am going to institute against you. But you are mistaken, for I happen to know the truth; yes, I know everything that is going on at 'd'Albrays,' in spite of your bars and locks, and I know that at this moment you are telling me an abominable lie."

This violent sally seemed to disconcert Count de Trémeillan, who had counted on the effect of this revelation. He started abruptly to his feet, took off his hat, and gasped for breath.

In short, conquered by Armand's energetic determination and finding it useless to continue the struggle in the face of the latter's calm and cool resolution, he dropped heavily on to the seat and held down his head. But for the fast gathering darkness around, Armand might have seen the deep ravages on the Count's face, produced by the late events. He was very pale, his eyes were swollen with want of sleep, and the erstwhile haughty and imperious look had made room for a vague, sombre stare.

"What is to be the upshot of all this according to you, I should like to know?" he said trying to adopt a resolute tone, which was, however, belied by the trembling voice.

"I ask you once more, Monsieur le Comte, to relinquish your intention of being represented at the forthcoming trial, to leave the country for some time. In trying to defend yourself, you will only draw greater attention to the affair."

"You are still harping upon the same thing," said the Count in an angry tone. "And this is all you have to say to me, Monsieur? You still presume to give me the advice I rejected with contempt. Do you think I shall abandon my defence

when I have got such magnificent grounds to go upon. Do you think I am going to let a barrister wag his tongue at me when I have the means of confounding my accusers? No, Monsieur, a thousand times no. You want to carry this through. Very well, so be it then; and we shall see who will get the worst of this affair."

"Monsieur, a week hence you will be served with a subpoena." They were the last words Armand addressed to Count de Trémeillan until the day they stood facing one another in the Assize Courts.

For some time after the Count had left Armand remained in the garden, awaiting Jean Torquenié's return.

At last he came, out of breath, for he guessed that the young fellow was terribly anxious. He had run all the way from "d'Albrays" to Mesnil.

"Mademoiselle de Trémeillan is all right," he said the moment he got close to Armand. "I went to the front door by myself. I rang the bell and asked for charity. I took care to make a good deal of noise to draw the attention of the servants. Meanwhile she managed to slip in unperceived by the back door."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FEW weeks later André Gérard received from his friend Armand d'Arcay the following letter:—

"My dear André,—I am going through the sorest trial that can befall a man in life. I stand very much in need of your affection; come to me for a few days, for I am alone, and have to spend many hours in deep sorrow. The trial commenced on the 9th October. I succeeded in concealing, for a long while,

from my mother the sad events that are impending. But I was unable to afford a plausible explanation of the postponement of my marriage, and of the cessation of our intercourse with Monsieur de Trémeillan and his daughter. Moreover, I foresaw that this trial would cause a great sensation in the neighbourhood, and did not wish her to be informed of it by public rumour. So I told her everything, except the facts relating to my father and my personal efforts to obtain the reinstatement of Jean Torquenié. She remains in absolute ignorance of the important part I played in all this. You will come soon, will you not? It will be an act of kindness to come to me at this sad moment; your cheerfulness, your courage will do me good. Believe me, yours very affectionately, ARMAND D'ARCAY."

Immediately on receipt of this letter, André Gérard turned the picture upon which he was engaged to the wall, packed his modest portmanteau and took train for Rennes, where he arrived next day at twelve. Armand was in a very sad and low-spirited condition. The young men spent the day together. Armand told his friend all the particulars of the latter events.

"The attitude of Count de Trémeillan is really despicable," he wound up. "Considering the haughty and defiant way in which he took things, I expected that he would boldly defend himself, that he would openly accept the responsibility of the murder of Viscount de Mortrée and contend that this crime was the just vengeance of an outraged husband. Not at all. I was afraid of his temper, of his violence; my great fear was the disgrace to the memory of the defunct Countess likely to result from the sensational nature of the affair. He himself pleaded in that sense in order to prevent the trial of which I had taken the initiative. But the moment hostilities commenced seriously he beat a retreat, which I can only qualify as contemptible. I told

you that his accomplice confessed under the influence of a kind of superstitious terror, and because her mind was unhinged by the news of the death of her master, which I abruptly told her. But when she found that I had deceived her, she endeavoured to retract her first statement.

"Interrogated by the examining magistrate, pursuant to the order granting the petition of a new trial to Jean Torquenié, she told a new version of the murder of Monsieur de Mortrée. She maintained that all she had told us on the occasion of our first visit was false, that she was suffering from fever and delirious, and that she did not remember even what she had said. It is very evident that the woman literally repeats the lesson prompted to her by the Count de Trémeillan. She takes the whole responsibility of the crime. She knew that Monsieur de Mortrée was her master's deadly enemy; she had seen the latter prowling about "d'Albrays," and she fancied that the young man had designs upon either the life or the honour of Count de Trémeillan, consequently made up her mind to kill him.

"After this she gives still another version of the crime. She pretends that she saw Viscount de Mortrée in a cutting near the house, and that she fired a first shot at him with the carabine she had purloined from Jean Torquenié's. Monsieur de Mortrée, who was unarmed, took flight immediately, under the impression that he was being attacked by some highway robber. He flung off his coat, which hampered his movements. Thereupon she lay in wait for him in the dense undergrowth. She loaded her carabine once more and killed him as he came by.

"Count de Trémeillan has also been examined. It would appear that he had thoroughly recovered his presence of mind, and was more arrogant than ever. He knew, no doubt, that he could depend on

"He indignantly denied having had any share in the murder of Monsieur de Mortrée. They read la Terreuse's statement over to him. He replied that the poor woman had been afflicted with strange delusions all her life; that at certain moments she seemed completely out of her mind.

"That's how he explained la Terreuse's senseless crime of having killed Monsieur de Mortrée without the slightest motive, and of her having subsequently, and in a moment of delirium, told the ridiculous and improbable story noted down by the magistrates and myself.

"After this you will understand the difficulties with which the authorities had to contend. After a score of years there is not much chance of either collecting proofs or witnesses. The sole basis for the revision of Jean Torquenié's trial was the statement of la Terreuse, who confessed herself guilty of the murder.

"We had no choice but to take her word, and seeing that she declared having conceived and executed the plan by herself, it was almost impossible to prove that she told a lie. The principal point as far as the judges were concerned was to make certain that Jean Torquenié was innocent, and according to both statements of la Terreuse the fact was patent. The question of the Count de Trémeillan's complicity in the murder was only a secondary one.

"Only three men know the whole of the truth and might have revealed it—the Abbé Dubois, Monsieur Rousseau, and I. But I knew that we might trust to the generous feeling of the barrister, to the discretion of the priest. The sole wish of both was to see the innocence of Jean Torquenié fully established.

"That is how things stand, friend André. La Terreuse will be convicted and the chief miscreant will once more go scot-free."

"Really, my dear Armand, I fail to see why you

should grieve so much about all this. Nay, it seems to me that, as far as Mademoiselle de Trémeillan and you are concerned, it is the best thing that could happen."

"The man is an ignoble coward."

"What does it matter to you seeing that he is not 'the father of his daughter'?"

"You are right, and between you and me it is my only comfort," replied Armand with a sad smile.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE 9th October was ushered in by dull, drizzly weather, of the kind so frequently met with under the skies of Brittany. The Rennes Court of Assizes was wrapt in that semi-darkness, conveying the sad impression one generally associates with the dimly lighted nave of a small church. The fine small rain beat incessantly against the tall pointed stained-glass windows. The monotonous and dismal sound proved a fitting accompaniment to the droning voice of the President, who was examining the prisoner and the witnesses.

Through the kind of grey mist that hung like a pall over the huge room, one caught a glimpse of a picture of Christ on the Cross, blackened with age, of three red spots—the judges' gowns, and of a double row of puzzled but attentive faces to the left—the jury. To the right a dark and attenuated form standing upright between two drowsy gendarmes, their hands crossed on the hilts of their swords.

It was la Terreuse.

On the wooden form set apart for the witnesses, a few aged peasants, contemporaries of the first drama, the *dénouement* of which had been enacted in the same

room. At one end of the seat, Jean Torquenié, grave and composed, and glancing in turns at the magistrates, at the jury, at the picture from which the pale figure of the Saviour stands out in relief; Jean Torquenié, who seems to review as if in a dream the events of that horrible day when he sat in that seat of shame, a prey to the most excruciating agony.

A little further on, the Count de Trémeillan in an arm-chair, courteously reserved for him by the presiding judge; Count de Trémeillan looking as stern and haughty as ever, carefully "got up," his elegantly-gloved hands leaning on the golden knob of his walking-stick. Not the slightest trace of the emotion boiling within on his stony face, which is deliberately averted from la Terreuse's. He has been subpoenaed as a witness.

In the enclosure reserved for the bar, the counsel for the defence—Maître des Vallières, well known in the profession, and a staunch adherent of Church and State, consequently the legal adviser of the landed aristocracy and gentry in those parts. He has been retained for the defence by no less a personage than Count de Trémeillan himself. Close to him Maître Rousseau, bent with age and sickness, but whose eyes dart flashes now and again at certain incidents in the proceedings.

In addition to these, a few *stagiaires* (probationers),* and among them Armand d'Arcay, looking pale and sad.

The proceedings are remarkably brief. It looks as if everyone concerned, judges, witnesses and counsel, are anxious to get the matter over.

The Court had been opened earlier than usual. Great care had been taken to avoid the sensational

* Barristers of less than three years' standing who are allowed to plead, but who have not been formally admitted into the Corporation.—TRANSLATOR.

rumours generally attendant upon criminal cases. The presiding judge had come to an understanding to this effect with the Prefect of the Department, who held undisputed sway over the local press, composed of two or three semi-official papers, crawling in the dust before the representative of the Imperial Government.

"The authorities wished the whole affair to be "got through" quickly, "decently," and were anxious that this reparation for a judiciary error should take place, as it were, with "closed doors." Hence the Court was but sparsely tenanted. A few peasants and as many idlers of the working classes were dozing away in the corners against the dark wainscotting.

The examination of la Terreuse—the most important part of the trial, seeing that both the accusation and the exculpation of Jean Torquenié were based upon her evidence—the examination of la Terreuse was hurried through by the presiding judge.

When she was told to stand up in order to answer the questions that were going to be put to her, it looked as if she would be unable to bear the fatigue of her examination and of the trial to the end. The voice issued low and trembling from beneath the black hood that partly hid her face. The judge told her to sit down and to pull back her hood. She complied slowly, and when her head was exposed to view the shifty and frightened eyes glanced restlessly at those around her, until they met those of Count de Trémeillan significantly fixed on hers. She shuddered visibly, and gently bent her head in token of submission, her black and withered hands clutched at the top of the dock, and her voice grew louder and more distinct. Monsieur Rousseau and Armand d'Arcay, who were the only ones that knew the particulars of this drama, could not help admiring the rare intelli-

gence, the wonderful presence of mind shown by la Terreuse under the present circumstances.

She began by asking pardon of God and her master for having offended them. Yes, she had been very guilty. There seemed to be days in her life when the evil spirit took possession of her and goaded her into doing wicked deeds.

Then she told the judges how she had been led to kill Viscount de Mortrée. She had, as it were, obeyed an inner voice, which reminded her day and night that if she did not kill that young man some terrible harm would befall her kind master. After this she recounted the precautions she had taken to shift the crime on to Jean Torquenié's shoulders, and in a lower tone than she had adopted hitherto, admitted having poisoned Marianne because she was under the impression that the Torquenié woman had seen her take the carabine from the cupboard.

When she got thus far she kept silent for a moment or so, apparently lost in meditation, for when she resumed her narrative she clasped her hands as if in prayer, bent her head, and once more beseeched her master to pardon her for having gravely offended him.

In the same tone of humility, she stated that, racked with remorse and feeling her end to be near, she had asked kind Monsieur d'Arcay, the intended husband of her young mistress, to bring two magistrates in order to confide an important secret to them. She had assuredly made up her mind to tell them everything and to confess her crimes. But when she found herself in their presence she had lost her head, the evil spirit had taken possession of her once more and made her say things which she regretted with all her heart. She had accused her kind master, and her kind mistress who was a saint. She was a debased wretch who deserved no pity. Saying which she began to sob violently which

incident produced a deep impression on the audience.

Count de Trémeillan remained perfectly unmoved, and when his turn came to give his evidence, he rose slowly from his seat, carefully took off his gloves and placed them in his hat in front of him. Every one of his movements was calm and collected; he was evidently straining every nerve to remain within the part he had set himself.

His evidence was to the effect that, like every one in the neighbourhood, he was aware of the profound hatred towards him of Viscount de Mortrée, a hatred that had been bequeathed to the young fellow by his father. Still, he did not think for one moment that this family feud would have ever prompted Viscount Marcellin to commit a criminal act towards him. La Terreuse had been carried away by her zeal, by her fanatical devotion. It was an open secret that the woman suffered from periodical attacks of madness. In years gone by she had had her head laid open by a sabre cut in the Vendée, and since then she had not always been right in her mind.

In a deeply moved voice the Count besought the mercy of the jury for this old servant of his family. As for himself he freely forgave her the odious fabrication with which her own fear had inspired her.

"Though I have always led a somewhat retired life," he said, "I am sufficiently well known in the neighbourhood, and so is my family. People know the character of the dear and saint-like creature I lost, and whose death afflicted me to an extent such as to defy all consolation even up to the present. I do not think it necessary to prove that the woman told a falsehood when she made that horrible accusation against her unfortunate mistress and myself."

And Monsieur de Trémeillan overcome with

moment and remained silent. The President told him to wait for a little while until he was more composed, and pointed out to him that the prosecution had paid no attention to this cruel and mendacious statement, which, moreover, the prisoner herself had declared to be false in all her subsequent depositions, and for which she publicly asked pardon.

Then came Jean Torquenié's turn to be examined, and though the President endeavoured to show himself as impartial with regard to him as he had been with regard to the other witnesses, one could not help noticing a kind of sharpness in the questions he put to the erstwhile gamekeeper.

The man was evidently looked upon as an ill-advised nuisance who had taken it into his head to impair the prestige of the magistracy by showing that, like every human institution, the latter is also subject to error, and liable to be influenced unfairly by passion.

Jean Torquenié, very calm and grave, recapitulated the old facts. Not the slightest complaint came from his lips; he neither accused the examining magistrate who had wrung his confession from him by torturing him, nor the President who had insulted him. He felt that the moment of reparation had come, and generously pardoned everyone.

He only showed that he was innocent, and that poor Marianne had been the victim of an infamous charge. She was a good and saint-like woman, he said finally, and with a deep sigh. After which he returned to his seat.

A few unimportant witnesses gave their evidence.

At last the Public Prosecutor rose to address the jury.

He strictly adhered to the final version of la Terreuse. His speech was short. Confronted as they were with the confession of la Terreuse on all

points, the Court should neither hesitate nor delay with regard to the verdict that was to reinstate in public opinion an innocent man. The case was different with regard to the sentence of la Terreuse. Twenty years ago he would have deliberately demanded the supreme penalty of the law for this miserable, wretched creature guilty of two crimes. But to-day they were dealing with an old woman nearly eighty, who probably had but a few days to live before appearing before the judgment seat of the Almighty, whose everlasting decision would annul that delivered by mankind. He admitted that she was deserving of some commiseration, and he would, therefore, leave her to the wisdom and the equity of the jury.

After this very moderate speech and utterly unlike the impassioned words hurled at Jean Torquenié, twenty years previously by the Public Prosecutor, the task of the counsel for the defence was comparatively easy.

He simply pleaded madness, fanatical madness. He represented this poor, untutored, uncultivated woman as having been led astray by her fanatical devotion to her master, as having made herself the executrix of a vendetta on the representative of a family at feud with that of the de Trémeillans. He implored the jury to be merciful. "Heaven alone knows what she must have suffered during these twenty years, how her heart must have been racked with remorse, her sleep haunted by horrible dreams. She became guilty because she loved her master, a rare attachment now-a-days. This invulnerable devotion, bequeathed to her like a tradition by her own kind who had been the servitors of the de Trémeillans for four hundred years, made a fanatic of her. She became a criminal in a moment of madness. But on the other hand we have a whole life of exemplary piety, and the

years since a poor orphan lad and brought him up to the best of her abilities."

About three the jury returned their verdict.

Anne Jouannette Poriquet, otherwise la Terreuse, was sentenced to ten years' solitary confinement.

She did not as much as budge on hearing her doom. Beneath her ample black hood she stood motionless like a statue. The gendarmes led her away, while Monsieur de Trémeillan, leaning back in his arm-chair in an indifferent attitude, did not even turn round to have a last look at her.

* * * * *

A few days later la Terreuse was found dead in prison. She sat huddled up in a corner of her cell, her ample black cloak wrapt round her, her rigid hands tightly holding against her lips a rosary and a scapulary which she had worn during her campaign in La Vendée.

Monsieur de Trémeillan did not survive her very long. After the trial he went to Austria, on the pretext of presenting his daughter to the Count de Chambord, in reality to escape from the threats of Armand d'Arcay, who had warned him that, unless he consented to his marriage with Marguérite, he would use against him the weapons found among the documents of Maître Rousseau.

The Count de Trémeillan was determined to remain away all his life rather than consent to such a union.

But during a shooting party in company with two of the secretaries of the Count de Chambord he had a nasty fall and broke his leg. The accident did not appear serious; a long spell of rest seemed all that was required. The fracture was, however, more complicated than they supposed at first, the flesh was severely injured. In a few days gangrene set in and an amputation became necessary.

A similar operation at the Count's time of life was attended with considerable danger. In fact, there

was a great loss of blood; a violent fever supervened, during which he had terrible fits of delirium.

He lingered for a fortnight, then died amidst horrible suffering.

Poor Marguérite returned to France and shut herself up at "d'Albrays," with no other company than that of an aged relative, for whom she had sent.

The death of her father was not likely to affect her very deeply. But all these events had undermined her health, and thorough rest became absolutely necessary.

She never went beyond the confines of her own park. Her longest walk was to the gamekeeper's lodge, where, at her express wish, Jean Torquenié and his daughter had taken up their quarters.

Armand and his mother paid her constant visits. The past was never mentioned, all their thoughts dwelt upon the future.

Finally, at the expiration of a twelvemonth, the Abbé Dubois united the young people in the chapel of "d'Albrays."

The marriage took place at midnight, before the altar, flooded with light and smothered in flowers. The witnesses to the marriage were André Gérard and Jean Torquenié.

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2. EDMÉE (LES DAMES DE CROIX-MORT). By GEORGES OHNET.
3. IRÈNE. By the PRINCESS OLGA CANTACUZÈNE-ALTIERI.
4. HÉLÈNE (MADAME VILLEFÉRAN JEUNE) By LÉON DE TINSEAU.
5. HARLETTE. By the COUNTESS * * *
6. ZYTE. By HECTOR MALOT.
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